
◇ The General Store ◇

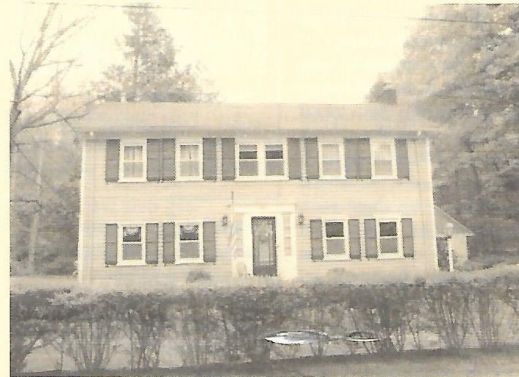
Tenant Housing From the Mid-19th Century

Those of you who drive south on Roxiticus Road toward Far Hills will recognize the two homes on this page. Although they are not photographed or written about as much as the Ralston Manor House behind the General Store or the Leddell home at 13 Roxiticus Road, these structures were an integral part of Ralston's early history. They provided living quarters for the workers in the mills that were operating during the 1800s.

Number 16 Roxiticus Road is currently owned by Mike and Jackie Carroll and is undergoing extensive repair and restoration. It is thought to have originally

been the property of Samuel Leddell. It appears on the 1868 and 1887 maps suggesting that it was a tenant house for mill workers. It has the classic architecture of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The house is on a raised fieldstone foundation. The gable roof, until recently, had sagged with age between the two interior end brick chimneys. Extensive repairs have been made to the front façade which had also begun to sag. Low ceilings and thick timber beams give this house a very historic feeling inside.

20 Roxiticus Road is also thought to have been a tenant house. Although it is a single family home today, it is believed to have been built as a



20 Roxiticus Road is believed to have been built as a two-family home and is also thought to have provided housing for the workers at the local mills. (Photo courtesy of T. Kinsel)



This house, at 16 Roxiticus Road is an example of tenant housing from the 1800s and is currently undergoing restoration. (Photo courtesy of T. Kinsel)

two family house. There is evidence of two entryways, staircases and hatches to the attic. Oddly enough, even though the home was built in 1865, there is no evidence of a fireplace.

A few years back, the current owner, Roxanna Wagner, had the front porch

removed in an effort to return the home more closely to its original look.

Both of these homes are handsome reminders of how adaptable 150 year old structures can be and how fortunate we are to have owners who are willing to do what is necessary to preserve them.

RHA Annual Meeting

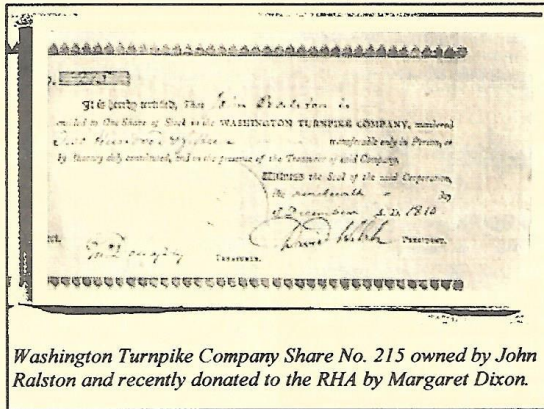
The Annual Meeting of the Ralston Historical Association will be held at 2 p.m. on June 22, 2003 at the General Store Museum, 313 Mendham Road—West (Rt. 24), at the intersection of Roxiticus Road. Trustees and officers will be elected and a review of last year's accomplishments and plans for this year will be discussed. The 2003 museum season began on Monday, May 26. Hours are from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. Sundays and Holidays through mid-October.

Which Way to the Washington Turnpike?

Directions to the Ralston General Store from Morristown: At the Morristown courthouse, take the Washington Turnpike west to Mendham, continue through Mendham past Ebenezer Byram's Black Horse Tavern, go thence another mile to John Ralston and Hugh Nesbitt's General Store, located at the crossroads near mile marker 8 from Morristown, but before you travel the bridge over the North Branch of the Raritan River.

In the first decade of the nineteenth century these were clear directions you might follow to get to the Ralston General Store. Lest you get lost, today we refer to the Washington Turnpike by several other common names depending on the town and location, all-visible on a current day map: State Route 24, Morris County 510, Washington Street and Mendham Road. The names are now different, but the fact is the main road we travel every day east to west in Mendham and the road that still passes the Ralston General Store was built and operated at one time as a toll road.

According to Munsell's "History of Morris County," in the early nineteenth century both the population and industry in Morris County were growing, and better roads were in demand. Many new business ventures were formed to accommodate this growing need. One of them was the Washington Turnpike Company, chartered by an act of the New Jersey Legislature on March 3, 1806 to build a



Washington Turnpike Company Share No. 215 owned by John Ralston and recently donated to the RHA by Margaret Dixon.

turnpike from Morristown to Phillipsburg, with a branch to Schooley's Mountain passing by the popular mineral springs on the way to Hackettstown. David Welsh, as president, along with several other incorporators, issued subscriptions of 12,000 shares at \$25.00 each to the public to fund the project. The turnpike began by the courthouse or possibly farther west where the current Egbert Ave. intersects Washington St. opposite Burnham Park in Morristown, and took the following path:

"It (the Washington Turnpike Company) built the road which, leaving Morristown by the courthouse, is still the principal road to Mendham; running thence through Chester, by the late General Cooper's Mills (Cooper Grist Mill) to German Valley (Long Valley), and so up Schooley's Mountain, through Springtown to the Mountain hotels, where it branched, the "spur going north to Hackettstown and the main line continuing through Pleasant Grove toward Phillipsburgh."

As the name implies, travelers on the Washington Turnpike should bring money, since this was a toll road. According to Harold J. Nunn's "The Story of Hackettstown, New Jersey—1754 to 1955", which quotes a copy of the original charter kept in Washington, NJ, a printed list of rates was required to be posted at all times as follows:

"Per each mile traveled: for every carriage, sleigh or sled drawn by beast, ONE CENT. For each additional beast, ONE CENT. For each beast, exceeding four, TWO CENTS. For every horse and rider or lead horse or mule, ONE CENT. For every dozen calves, sheep or hogs, FIVE MILLS. For every dozen of horses, mules or cattle, ONE CENT."

The Charter continues on to cover other important conditions of travel and tries not to restrict business, or inconvenience some aspects of public travel.

"The company shall not demand any toll from any persons passing to or from public worship on the

Sabbath day, or to or from any mill to which he may resort for the grinding of grain for his family's use. Or for horses, carriages, sleighs or sleds conveying a person to or from a funeral, or any person passing to or from any business on the farm, or any militiaman passing to or from any training on a muster day appointed by law."

All important exceptions considering that John Ralston owned a Gristmill across the street from the General Store.

According to the book "The Mendhams," John Ralston had a reputation for investing generously in local property and business ventures, in addition to his share in the general store. He also owned several shares in the Washington Turnpike Company. Share No. 214 and 215 were purchased by John Ralston in 1810 and recently donated to the Ralston Historical Association by Margaret Dixon, a descendant of the Nesbitt family. One can notice the raised seal of the Washington Turnpike Company on this share containing the bust of a horse.

It is not known if John Ralston ever profited from this investment; however in 1823 the property of the Washington Turnpike Company was sold at sheriff sale to James Wood, indicating the company had its share of financial problems and not unlike current day turnpikes. According to Wheaton J. Lane's "From Indian Trail to Iron Horse," by the 1830s, the days of turnpike construction were over due to competition

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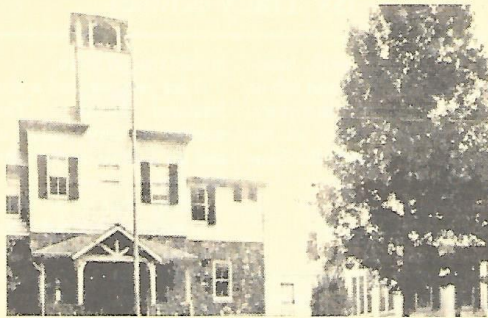
Oral History Recalls Mendham's Past

When it comes to recalling local history, Ruth Menagh Crammer, 92, of Mendham Borough has plenty of stories to tell. Ruth was born in the house that is now 15 Mountain Avenue next to the ball field in the Borough. She was the youngest of eight children - her mother, whose maiden name was Day, was born in Brookside and her father was born in the house in the Borough on East Main Street that is now number 33.

Like most of the children of that time, Ruth recalls attending grammar school on Hilltop Road. The school is now gone but was not far from the current one. She and her classmates used to climb a stone wall in front of what is now the Bailey Funeral Home, much to the dismay of the owner's wife who would periodically chase them away.

Sunday's were spent in church—Ruth attended the Hilltop Church where, she said, "Your family always sat in the same pew." She fondly speaks of the gentleman who sat in front of her as a child. He would toss nickels behind him as a way of keeping the younger worshippers amused.

There were apparently plenty of venues in town for socialization. Behind the current firehouse was a basketball court. The top floor of the old firehouse, now the Weichert Realtors building, was a dance hall. From time to time there



The old Mendham Grammar and High School, 1915. Photo courtesy of "The Mendhams."

were even minstrel shows with actors in black face sponsored by the Pastime Club.

Ruth has a photo of her father next to a horse drawn fire truck when he was the fire chief. Back then, the fire bell was located in the center of Mendham at the intersection of Main Street and Mountain Avenue. According to Ruth, "When the bell was sounded, everyone ran quickly for safety" as no one wanted to be in the path of the horses carrying the

firemen and their gear.

In the afternoon, while she was in grammar school, Ruth worked as a switchboard operator for the local telephone company. The house containing the switchboard was owned by the Nubers and was located at the intersection of Park Avenue and Mountain Avenue. This house was eventually torn down to make way for the entrance to Park Avenue.

Ruth recalls a particularly busy day when one of the Lowery boys got lost in the

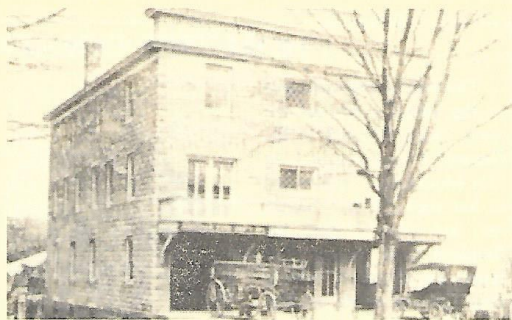
woods. At that time, the telephone operator was, by nature of her work, the person most likely to know the latest information. Ruth recalls receiving a flood of calls from people wanting to know if the boy had been found. She said, "I just couldn't keep up with the number of calls coming in."

Once Ruth started high school, she needed to devote more time to her homework and so she gave up her operator job. It was customary at that time for the Mendham teenagers to attend the first three years of high school in town and then transfer to Morristown for the final year.

After high school, Ruth worked for MEPCO, a company that made electronic transistors. It was located where the Mendham Garden Center now stands.

Today, Ruth lives on Emery Avenue and recalls that at the time she and her husband built their house, there were only four houses on the street. From Dean Road down to the "mud hole" as it has always been called, was the Florie Farm Dairy. Mendham had a number of farms up until about 35 years ago.

When Ruth was asked about the difference between World War II and the current war, not surprising perhaps, she said the people back in the 1940s were "much more patriotic." In fact she has a very vivid memory of how the people in Mendham celebrated the end of World War II. She recalls there was a "long parade of cars driving up and down Main Street, everyone so happy and honking their car horns."



Mendham Borough Fire House 1908. Photo courtesy of "The Mendhams."

The President's Message

By Tracy Kinsel

Thank you to our members who have supported the Ralston General Store so generously over the years. This year looks to be another busy year for us. Our season starts on the usual first day of summer vacation activities, Memorial Day. But remember, you don't always have to travel far to see something interesting. Sometimes the best things are right in your own town. Such is the case with the Ralston General Store Museum.

A Peek Inside the Ralston General Store

The museum is a great place to learn about local history firsthand. Come browse through our postcard/picture collection, and read several of the early deeds we have on hand. Look through the Ralston scrapbook and read clippings that tell the story of how the Ralston Post Office became the Ralston General Store Museum.

The museum is filled with artifacts used in every day life in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, some made right here in Mendham! An example is an axe made by the Willet iron forge in Ralston. See our collection of tools, early lighting, cookware, toys, just to name a few. Kids love the display of Indian Arrowheads found right here in Mendham. Time couldn't be better spent!

This year our special exhibit is a tribute to the life of one of Mendham's great women, Ella Mockridge. An

author, teacher, artist, historian, she did it all and left us with a legacy rich in history. She donated many of the items now found in the General Store.

Plans for this Year

In addition to our special exhibit, we have several other activities planned for this year. Interior maintenance is high on our list of priorities. It's been many years since plaster repair and fresh paint have been applied to the interior of the General Store. We also will be working with a professional museum consultant to reorganize our display to make your visit to the General Store more informative and interesting.

We plan to introduce a TV/video player to the museum. Initially, we'll use it in our Ella Mockridge exhibit, but we also plan to make additional tapes this year which will feature our historian, Wilma Sagurton explaining some of the items

in the General Store.

Last year we had a professional docent. This worked out very well for us and we plan to do the same this year.

Many thanks to those who have contributed to the acquisitions/collections fund last year. Your generous support raised \$1,205 dollars towards our goal of \$4,500 dollars. The rare Dodd surveying instrument, made in Mendham, is still high on our list of items to add to our collection using this fund.

Museum Hours

Many of you ask us the same question; "When is the General Store open? I always drive by but never find you open." Well, we are open Sundays 2—5 p. m., from Memorial Day to mid-October. Last year we had 238 visitors with the furthest traveler from Nottingham, England. To contact us or make arrangements for a group tour, call

973-543-6878 or send an email to pfr14@aol.com.

Ralston General Store Website

To learn more about us, please visit our web-site at www.ralstonmuseum.org.

Don't forget to pay us a visit this summer and please sign our guest book. Again, thank you for your continued support!

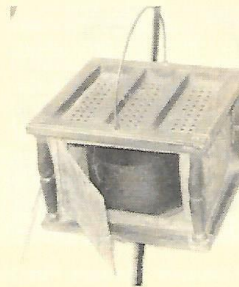
Turnpike

continued

from railroads, canals and the public's resistance to paying tolls, as indicated by the creation of several turnpikes along the main road. It is not known exactly when the Washington Turnpike ceased to be a toll road, but by 1897 the New Jersey Legislature passed an act that allowed the buyout of many of the turnpike companies in New Jersey, thus making the roads free to the public.

FROM THE COLLECTION

The foot warmer pictured to the right is one of the many items donated to the General Store Museum by Ella Mockridge. According to her niece Wilma Sagurton, hot embers from the fireplace were placed in a round tin container with a thin layer of ashes on top. The tin container was then placed inside the square wooden box. The holes at the top kept the embers from



Foot Warmer

smothering. Ladies would keep the foot warmer on the floor under a blanket in a sleigh, wagon or church for warmth as there was no other source of heat. Another variation of the foot warmer was made of soapstone. It too could be placed under a blanket or in a muff or sleeve for warmth. You can view the foot warmer at this year's Ella Mockridge exhibit.

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313 Mendham Road West
Mendham, NJ 07945



Ralston Historical Association
Established in 1941

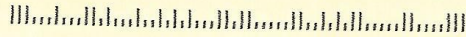
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