

# THE GENERAL STORE



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NEWSLETTER OF THE RALSTON HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

SUMMER 2008

## From the Past:

### End of the Line for Mendham's Landmark Tree

by Tracy M. Kinsel

According to *The Mendhams*, the old oak tree at the corner of West Jersey Proprietor Kirkbride's land (currently Cold Hill and Mendham Road), was the starting point for what was known as the "Kirkbride Line", a boundary that extended well into Roxbury Township, and marked large tracts of land, some of which make up the current Mendhams.

In the late 1600s, the area that is now Mendham was part of West Jersey, land purchased from the Indians by the West Jersey Board of Proprietors. Two of the early landholders, and also West Jersey Proprietors, were Joseph Kirkbride and William Penn, founder of the city of Philadelphia.

In the book *Colonial and Revolutionary Morris County*, Theodore Thayer states that by rule Proprietors received 1250 acres of land per share. But early land boundaries were not always clear. The East Jersey Proprietors maintained that the East/West Jersey division line of 1687, which ran from Little Egg Harbor to the northernmost branch of the Delaware River, was incorrect and these lands were part of East Jersey. In 1743 the line was



THE OLD WHITE OAK, Mendham's Landmark Tree, weakened by old age but still standing, was cut down in 1989 to make way for the current intersection at Cold Hill and Mendham Road. Chas and Denise Mueller snapped this picture on the tree's last day. (Moro house is behind.)

redrawn and most of Morris County became part of East Jersey. The result was much confusion in the area of titles and land claims.

Until it was cut down in 1989 to make way for the current intersection at Cold Hill and Mendham Road, Mendham's landmark oak tree at the beginning of Kirkbride's Line" continued as a popular reference point in many of Mendham's land deeds.

## The Widow Ralston House



At 305 Mendham Road W. at the top of the Ralston curve sits a red house with yellow trim known as the Widow Ralston House. Although he had owned thousands of acres of land and run a prosperous trade business, by the

time his daughter Mary Ann married his business partner Hugh Nesbitt in 1818, John Ralston was to die in 1819 with depleted assets. His long illness and mortgages he had loaned that were not repaid drained his finances. Ralston must have been pleased when his daughter married Nesbitt, knowing that his family would be taken care of. It is thought that his widow, Margaret, moved out of the Manor House after his death and moved up the road to a smaller house built for her in 1825, now known as the Widow Ralston House.

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Please join us for the **Annual Meeting of the Ralston Historical Association** which will be held at **1 pm on Sunday, July 13** at the General Store which is on Rt. 24 at the intersection of Roxiticus Road.

The 2008 museum season began on May 25th and will continue through mid-October. **The museum is open on Sundays and holidays from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.** The museum docent is Paula Duer.

## The President's Message by Jeff Purcell

The Ralston General Store opened its doors on Memorial Day Weekend. This year visitors will notice improved presentation of the display thanks to the installation of track lighting around the perimeter of the room – continuing the evolution from candles, to light bulbs, to spot lights and now, the fourth generation – what would John Ralston say if he could see the store today!

In keeping with the improved lighting, we will retain our Early Lighting display from last year - it's just too good to only have for one year. You'll notice the "From the Collection" article that highlights one of the local lighting artifacts from the Mendham area – a lantern originally used at the Black Horse Inn. Other plans for this year include republishing Ella Mockridge's book, *Our Mendham*, improving the [ralstonmuseum.org](http://ralstonmuseum.org) website and a Fall event. Be sure to include your email address on your membership form so that we can inform you of upcoming activities.

If you find the history of the Mendham area interesting, why not consider attending our monthly meetings? We're an informal group who enjoy the preservation of the local area history and maintaining our small one room museum at the corner of Rt. 24 and Roxiticus Road. We're always looking for people who would be interested in helping out with store maintenance, publicity, research and bookkeeping. As always, it's volunteer work and if you have a couple of hours month to help, we welcome new faces and new ideas. We usually meet on the first Thursday of each month at 7:30 pm. Call 973-543-7834 or email [rip543@comcast.net](mailto:rip543@comcast.net) (we usually meet at one of the trustees' homes) for the address.

## From the Collection

by Wilma Sagurton

Early on before the days of the trendy Black Horse restaurants the Inn was actually an 18th century inn. The section known as the Pub was a wagon shed open on the south side, where wagons could be backed in with the seats under shelter from inclement weather.

The largest part of the barn was used to store hay and grain for the animals and supplies for the Inn. It presently houses the bar, a "new" fireplace, 2 servers' stations and benches and tables with chairs for customers. The Pub also has tables with benches or chairs as the customer chooses. The kitchen ran along the north side of the Pub, with the entrance on the left (west) side. The "barn" area retains the original beams with some additions and a triangular windowed peak following the original lines of the building. It is decorated with items from the horse and buggy days.

There is a shop on the lowest level, which originally held stalls for the visiting horses. The horses were saddle-lightweight animals, moderate weight for handling light buggies or wagons and dray horses which hauled the heavy freight wagons of commerce or private use. The trip across the state took 2 days so it was important to both man and beast to have a warm and comfortable and well-fed rest.

We have in our collection the original stable lantern (kerosene) with a red glass. This dim light prevented spooking the stabled horses when the attendant passed through to check and care for the horses.

The lantern was purchased from Mr. Barton Gray, father of Gloria, who told the story of its use. It can be seen in the lighting display in the Ralston General Store.

### *Black Horse Pub Lantern*



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The house was extensively renovated in the 1990s, and the kitchen renovated in 2004. There are three fireplaces. In 2008 the house was purchased by Lori Myers and Mike Princiotta. Lori and Mike are to be married July 4, 2008 at Hildene, home of Robert Todd Lincoln, the only child of

Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln to survive to adulthood, in Manchester, Vermont. We wish them the best as they begin their married life in such an historic location and return home to steward the Widow Ralston's House.

Contact Valerie Horowitz, Newsletter Editor at [benvallian@aol.com](mailto:benvallian@aol.com) or 973-543-0840 evenings about featuring your historic Mendham Township home here in our next newsletter.

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\* Additional contribution

Ralston Historical Association  
313 Mendham Road West  
Mendham, NJ 07945



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Established in 1941

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Secretary – *Margaret Hogan*  
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Visit our website: [www.ralstonmuseum.org](http://www.ralstonmuseum.org)

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

### *2008– 2009 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)

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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](mailto:rjp543@comcast.net).*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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Please make your tax deductible check payable to:

**Ralston Historical Association**  
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