Evesham Township - Marlton

By Joseph M. Laufer

One of Burlington County's original eight townships, established in 1866, Eversham, was named after a Borough in England, near Stratford on Avon. It encompassed portions of what are now Mount Laurel, Medford, Lumberton, Hainesport, Shamong and Washington Townships. It was eventually incorporated as a township in 1798 and after several modifications became present-day Evesham as we know it, a 29.7 square mile community on the western boundary of Burlington County bordering Camden County, often referred to by the name of its most historic community, Marlton.

Thomas Eves was one of the first settlers in an area once known as Evesboro, in the vicinity of Greentree Road and Maple Avenue. Early Quaker settlers, some who arrived as early as 1672, had to travel to Haddonfield or Mount Laurel (Evesham Meeting, established in the early 1700s) for their services. Eventually, the Quakers who lived in the Cropwell community along Old Marlton Pike held meetings in their homes until their own Meeting House was established in 1809. It was preceded by a schoolhouse in 1792. Today, Cropwell Meeting is still active, a peaceful, pastoral oasis surrounded by a modern housing development, appropriately called "Marlton Meeting" and an auto dealership along Route 70.

One of Evesham's early neighborhoods was called Millford, now Kresson, which straddles the Camden County border. The Marlton Lakes community is near what was once called Crowfoot, at the southern tip of the Township near Berlin.

In recent years, the Township has grown dramatically, with communities such as Kings Grant, Brush Hallow, Heritage Village, Arrowhead and others serving as new population centers and helping to bring the total population of the Township to approximately 42,500. Indicative of the townships rapid and extensive growth is the fact that in 1970, the population was 13,000!

Evesham's history has been documented back to 7000 B.C., as discovered in excavations and digs on what is known as the Savich farm, once slated for recreational fields, but preserved when pre-historic bones and artifacts were unearthed. These archaeologically significant grounds are located on East Main Street in Marlton.

During the Revolutionary War, Evesham played a role during the evacuation of Philadelphia by the British 1n 1778. At that time, British General Henry Clinton's troops retreated through Evesham to join troops in New York. The troops encamped in an area between Greentree Road, Church Road and Route 73, the site of the present Evesham Corporate Center. General Clinton stayed in the historic Thomas Eve's House off Greentree Road during the encampment. Skirmishes took place as the American troops, following orders from General George Washington, harassed the British and delayed their retreat while he and his troops worked their way from winter encampment at Valley Forge to head off the British.

Evesham's Black History connection centers around two houses on the Underground Railroad – the Isaac Evans/Thomas Evans House on East Tuckerton Road and one next to the Cropwell Friends Meeting House on the corner of Old Marlton Pike and Cropwell Road (no longer standing).The house at 875 East Tuckerton Road was built in 1750 for Isaac Evans, a Quaker and member of prominent Evesham colonizers. A hidden passageway which was used, it is believed, to hide runaway slaves by one of his descendants, Thomas Evans, was discovered during the 1950s.

The railroad came to Evesham Township in 1871 and continued service for about 60 years. The double track road bed is now Route 70 and the station was located between North Maple Avenue and Cooper Street in Marlton. Called the Medford Branch of the Camden and Atlantic Railroad, passenger service ended in 1928 and freight service around 1930.

In 1955, the U.S. Army opened the PH-32 Nike Ajax facility on Tomlinson Mill Road. This battery was one of twelve used to shield Philadelphia from aerial assault during the Cold War. The Marlton facility consisted of two underground magazines that stored a total of 16 Nike-ajax missiles. The base was decommissioned in the mid-1960s. Today it is the location of Briarwood, an upscale housing development. The only other similar base in Burlington County was located in Lumberton.

The heart of the community is the Village of Olde Marlton. The name came about when the commercial value of one of the area's natural resources, Marl, was discovered early in the 19th century. Marl is a naturally occurring mixture of green clay with remnants of shells that was used as a fertilizer, like manure. Its discovery helped local commerce and fueled the region's first "building boom", which took place in the 1830s and 1840s. Marl continued to be mined locally until 1930, when the pits were finally closed.

Around 1758 the area became the center of trade for the farms that surrounded it. The village was named Marlton in 1845, the same year the Post Office and Baptist Church adopted the name. Most maps and directional signs refer to Marlton instead of Evesham. The Historic Village, Olde Marlton, remains mostly intact and the Township requires property owners to preserve the historical integrity of buildings in the village.