

Woodbridge Township Historic Preservation Commission 2018-2019 Essay Contest

As of next year, 2019, Woodbridge will be celebrating its Sesquicentennial Anniversary, meaning it has been 350 years since Woodbridge Township, the oldest original township in New Jersey, was given an official charter in 1669 by King Charles of England. However, this is not Woodbridge's first anniversary celebration. In 1969, Woodbridge's 300th Tercentennial Anniversary, citizens celebrated in several different ways, such as holding competitions, balls, and fairs.

The citizens of Woodbridge celebrated the Tercentennial Anniversary of Woodbridge by holding two music competitions. The first competition, called Music in Splendor, was a marching and maneuvering competition that was held on Friday, June 5, at 8 o'clock at night. The event took place at Woodbridge Senior High School and was sponsored by the Saints Drum and Bugle Corps. Competing groups included The Blessed Sacrament, The Garfield Cadet, O. L. P. H. Ridgeman, St. Andrew's Bridgeman, New York Knickerbockers, The Muchachos, and an exhibition by The Saints. Mayor Ralph P. Barone said, "There was only one word for the competition - tremendous!" (*Leader Press*, July 30, 1969.) A second drum and bugle corps competition were held on August 3 at 8 PM at the John F. Kennedy Memorial High School field. 20 different units participated. This time, Mayor Ralph said, "My advice to you is - don't miss it!" (*Leader Press*, July 30, 1969.)

The citizens of Woodbridge additionally celebrated its 300th anniversary by holding two different balls to celebrate its 300th anniversary. The 300th Anniversary Ball was held on November 27, 1969, at the Seven Arches in Perth Amboy. The event was called "... the climax of the tercentenary celebration..." (*Leader Press*, November 12, 1969.) At the ball, there was a

brief opening speech by 1969 Woodbridge Mayor Ralph P. Barone. A filet mignon dinner was served at 7 P.M. and dancing to music played by the Marty Ames Society Orchestra was at 9. Tickets were \$12.50. Mrs. Wolk told the publication *Leader Press* that, "This will be an evening for merrymaking, for having a good time." (*Leader Press*, November 12, 1969.) A second ball, called the Ninth Annual Debutante Ball, was held on Saturday, December 27, at Winfield Scott Hotel in Elizabeth. The ball had a tercentenary theme and it was the ninth time the ball was held. Parents sent in applications for their daughters to be selected as debutantes for the ball and the selected girls were trained by a professional choreographer. The event was sponsored by the Woodbridge Township Business and Professional Women's Club and all profits were donated to the BPW Scholarship Fund.

The citizens of Woodbridge also celebrated its 300th anniversary is by holding the free 300th Anniversary Fair. The fair was located at Merrill Park and held from noon to 11:30 at night on June 14th and 15th. Several bands, from rock'n'roll to bands to old-fashioned banjo bands to high school bands, played at the fair. The June 11, 1969 issue of *Leader Press* stated that "Altogether there will be 100 booths offering all kinds of items, foods of many lands and exhibits." (*Leader Press*, June 11, 1969.) Some notable booths included a booth owned by the Middlesex Water Company, a booth prepared by the Senior Citizens Organizations of the Township, a booth sponsored by the New Jersey Bell Telephone Company, a booth by the Shell Oil Company, a booth owned by Eastern Airlines, and a booth to buy souvenirs with the Woodbridge 300th anniversary seal, such as coins, plates, coffee cups, beer mugs, and ashtrays. There were also numerous exhibits under two canvas tents, such as the Art Exhibit, which consisted of a few hundred paintings. Additionally, there was a baked good and preserves contest, with cakes being judged on Saturday, June 14th, and cookies, pies, breads, and preserves

being judged on Sunday, June 15th. Finally, there were 6 rides and cotton candy and balloons for the children that attended. Ruth Wolk, the chairman of the anniversary committee, said on June 11, "And you are all most cordially invited to attend." (*Leader Press*, June 11, 1969.)

I would participate in the 300th Anniversary Fair because it sounded amusing and exciting. Since there were over 100 booths and a great of deal of exhibits, I would probably never get bored at the fair. Also, listening to the several bands that played would be entertaining. Additionally, riding the six rides would be exciting and I would look forward to eating the cloud-like, delicious cotton candy at the fair. Personally, I would have enjoyed watching the baking contest the most. Baking has always been an important tradition in my family that has been passed down from generations. Everyone in my family, including myself, enjoys not only eating the scrumptious food but making it as well. Baking, believe it or not, brings my family together, so I would enjoy attending the baking contest. Moreover, I predict that just attending the fair would be a remarkable experience. The news outlet *Leader Press* told readers to, "Expect 100,000 At Celebration June 14th-15th." (*Leader Press*, June 11, 1969.) Because so many people would attend, it would be interesting to meet some of the fair attendees. Who knows what type of people would attend? My 83-year-old Indian grandmother really opened my eyes, so to speak, to other's suffering and passed on some some knowledge to me when she told me about the things she had been through during the Indian Independence Movement against the British. Also, she gave me knowledge and wisdom. Surely, I would gain even more knowledge and wisdom when talking with some of the people at the fair.

Woodbridge is an amazing town with an even more amazing history. It's remarkable that no other township in the state has been around longer. The inhabitants of archaic towns like Woodbridge should be celebrated for their staggering feats of just being "alive" that long, like

how people in Woodbridge celebrated its 300th anniversary. In 1969, the townspeople of Woodbridge celebrated its 300th anniversary by holding competitions, balls, and fairs. It was a noble celebration for an even more noble town.