

swimming. Other wastes including medical debris further contaminated the area. It was not until the 1990s when New York, taking responsibility for the garbage and pollution dumped into the Arthur Kill, was forced to compensate Woodbridge Township. With this compensation, the Alvin P. Williams Park was established with renovated docks and boat landings, along with a marina and walking path still enjoyed today providing leisure enjoyment to Woodbridge residents.



Boynton Beach circa 1890



Sewaren Land & Water Club circa 1896

Woman's Club of Fords

The club started as a branch of the Woodbridge Woman's Club which was under the guidance of its president, Mrs. E. H. Boynton. In October 1920, the Woman's Club of Fords was founded at the home of Mrs. Annie Liddle. The ten charter members serving as the club's early nucleus were: Mrs. Annie Liddle, Mrs. Ray Mills, Mrs. Walter Ernst, Mrs. William Wood, Mrs. Frank Dunham, Mrs. Ralph Liddle, Mrs. E.T. Greene, Mrs. Royal Predmore, Mrs. A.L. Gardiner, and Mrs. T.W. Liddle who served as the club's inaugural president. The club was officially incorporated in 1924. In 1935, only 15 years since its organization, the Woman's Club of Fords increased its membership sevenfold boasting 70 members making the club one of the foremost groups in Woodbridge Township.

Early on, the primary activity of the Club focused on charity and volunteerism by initiating projects for those less fortunate in Woodbridge Township. These activities included distribution of food and clothing to the poorer families of the town, organizing fundraisers where proceeds went toward rent payments and doctor bills, and the creation of milk funds for needy children. The Club also was involved in social functions where club women made and served hot coffee and sandwiches to firefighters during large fires. One of its major accomplishments was the creation of a community library for the residents of Fords. The Club purchased property on Corielle St. in 1925 that became the library site until the Fords Library branch was opened on Ford Avenue in 1972. In 2013, the Woodbridge Township Historic Preservation Commission erected a marker on South Park Drive in the Marion and Norman Tanzman Recreational Area to com-

memorate its contributions and significance to Woodbridge Township.



Woman's Club of Fords marker

Recreational Clubs in Town

Leisure opportunities came in various forms for Woodbridge residents seeking alternative preferences to escape the grind of work and family obligations. From the late 1800s into the early 1900s, the Kingswood Drama Club offered a theatrical outlet to those with acting abilities and stage presence. For those musically inclined, the Woodbridge Fife and Drum Corp was established in the 1890s.

One of the more unique and unconventional events was a polo game on a field at Liberty Street in Fords played by participants on motorcycles. The Fords Motorcycle Club formed two teams to play a polo game in 1930. Despite the uniqueness of the contest, the match played on a Sunday afternoon was well attended with over 100 spectators.

In the early 1900s, archery became part of the curriculum in Woodbridge High School. This interest led to the formation of the Woodbridge Archery Club, which is still present today as the Woodbridge Arms & Archery Club.



Kingwood Drama Club



Woodbridge Fife & Drum Corps 1890s



Woodbridge Archery Club circa 1941

Athletic Clubs in Town

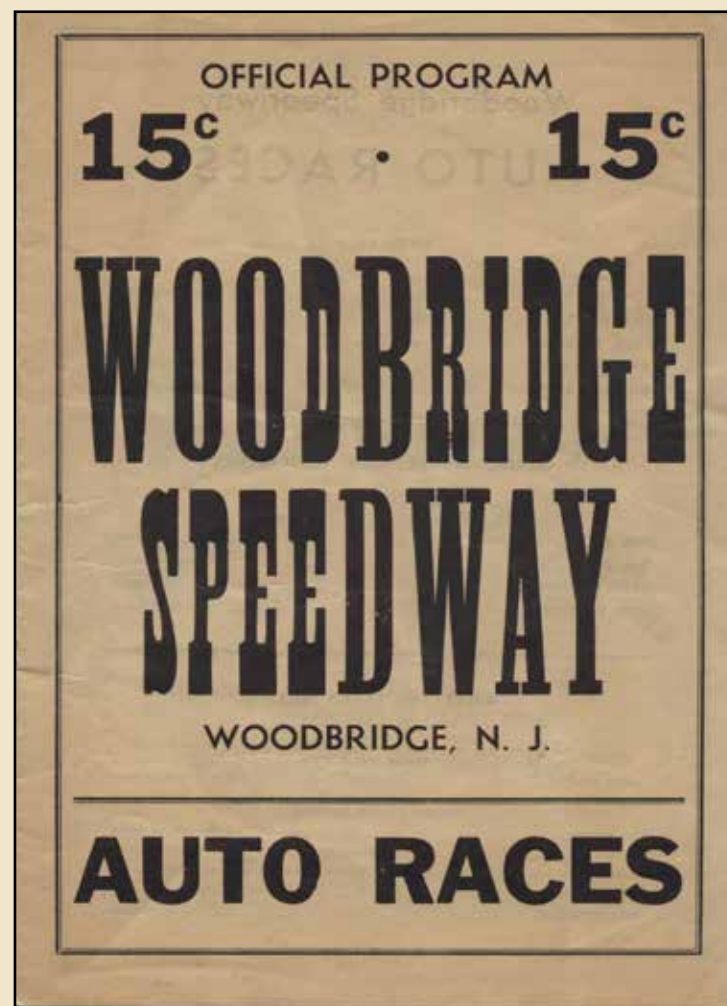
For the athletically inclined, many local establishments through church groups, companies and factories, and fraternal organizations offered various sporting options. The Kingswood Athletic Club sponsored a basketball team in the early 1900s that housed its own clubhouse on Grove Avenue. It was the first basketball team to play for the Township. Fords organized its own baseball team at the same time. The Woodbridge Police Department sponsored its own baseball team that reached its height of popularity in the 1920s.



Kingwood Athletic Basketball Team 1909-10



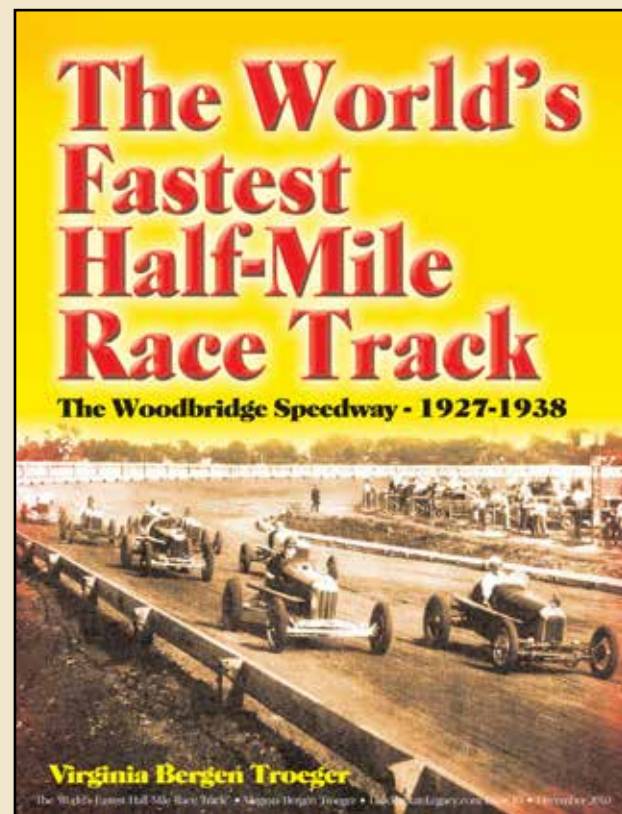
Fords Baseball Team 1912



Speedway Program Cover



Speedway Tickets 1930's



Cover and Photograph details from "The World's Fastest Half-Mile Race Track" by Virginia Bergen Troeger - GardenStateLegacy.com Issue 10 - December 2010



Woodbridge Police Dept. Baseball Team 1925



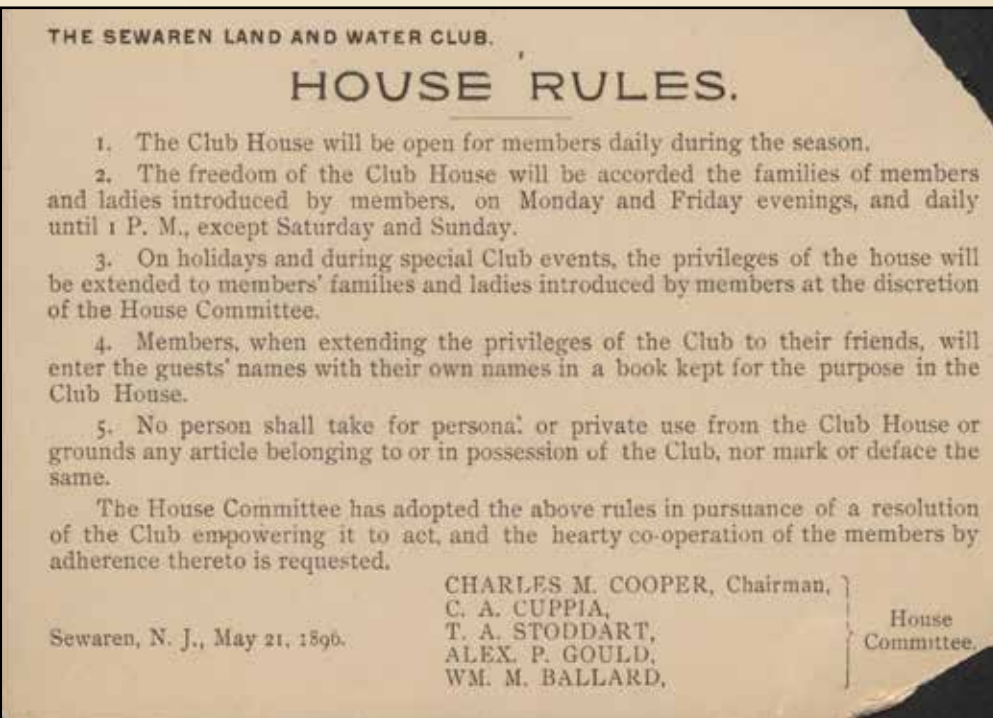
Speedway Wooden Stands 1930



Boynton Beach Postcard



WHS Girls Basketball Team 1922-23



The Sewaren Land and Water Club House Rules



Whippet Racing



Acker's Boat House, Sewaren



Boynton Beach Dance Pavilion



Boynton Beach Food Concession

the Woodbridge Township Committee depending on whether the changes recommended had been met.

Speedway owners worked to make repairs and changes using the list of needed repairs from the Prosecutor's office. These repairs included constructing a fifteen-foot hard surface apron to remove sharp angles, placing round head bolts on the outer guard rail, repairing track surface and supports, and erecting a guard rail or building a bank to protect spectators. In addition, the report required better policing of events. Racing was suspended until the repairs were completed satisfactorily.

Racing at the Speedway continued until 1938 when the Speedway fell on hard times. The Speedway officially closed in 1941. Approximately 10 years after the track closed, Woodbridge High School was built on part of the property. The football field was built on the site of the track years later and is still the home for the Woodbridge High School Barrons. In the 1970s the football field was renamed for long time beloved football coach of the Woodbridge Barrons, Nicholas J. Priscoe where football and many other activities are held.



Speedway Crash

Boxing in Woodbridge

Generally frowned upon by middle- and upper-class societies, boxing found its way into the American culture in the latter half of the 19th century. Theodore Roosevelt, the 26th President of the United States from 1901-1909, argued the credibility of boxing by saying, "powerful, vigorous men of strong animal development must have some way in which their animal spirits can find vent."

To temper the stigma of viciousness and brutality associated with boxing, many churches ran their own gym to support fighters in a more civilized and controlled environment. In Woodbridge, Our Lady of Peace Church in Fords sponsored a series of outdoor amateur boxing bouts on the church grounds in the 1940s. These events were well-attended, well-supervised, and provided community entertainment in town. Pugilists Billy Sparth, Jr., Frank Kantor, Bill Lewis, and Joe Bosze were noted Woodbridge residents with favorable outcomes in these boxing events.

Other venues had similar success hosting boxing exhibitions and competitions. When the Woodbridge Speedway was facing financial difficulties, an amateur boxing show was staged in July 1935 which helped to pull itself out of the red. In 1950, the Woodbridge High School Auditorium was the site for boxing bouts sponsored by the Woodbridge Lions Club under the supervision of Rahway Police Athletic League featuring three-round bouts for boys aged 11-14 from Woodbridge and Rahway.

Whippet Racing

Whippet racing, a form of dog racing, was active in Woodbridge in the late 1920s. Held on the Avenel Track at the Fairway Whippet Club, Rahway Avenue, Avenel, south of East Lime Crossing, races attracted clubs from New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Maryland. The races were held on Sunday afternoon at 3 p.m. Using dogs, including whippets, they raced enclosed in their own tracks and chased after an artificial lure to cross the finish line first. On race day 32 dogs (whippets) were entered in a race. The races consisted of eight preliminaries with four dogs in each followed by the semifinals and finals. The fee to enter was \$1 in 1929. Whippet race enthusiasts waged bets on the races. Entries from Long Island, New York, and Kearny took part in the races.

Led by Charles Flynn, President from Avenel; Wilson Yates, Vice President from Arlington; A. Shea, Treasurer from Avenel; Andrew Lockie, Financial Secretary, from Perth Amboy; and John Inglis, Secretary, from Perth Amboy. A

committee of four men supervised the races and judges were assigned to each race. The local Whippet track was well kept and fast. Some dogs could finish the race in a little over 12 seconds traveling over 200 yards of turf which was equivalent to fifty feet a second. Whippets were considered beautiful little animals that belonged to an aristocracy of dogdom known for their speed. They were carefully bred and trained for the track on which they would race. They were intelligent, accurate and delightful to watch.

To get ready for the race, each animal took its place in a narrow stall that was completely enclosed. Stalls were moved to the starting line and given the signal. A button was pressed, and the doors would open electronically, and the race would begin. Whippets would run between white wires keeping to their own track racing to finish first. Some of the winning whippets were Bonnie Doon owned by Mrs. John Inglis from Perth Amboy, Try Me from Baltimore, Maryland, and Orme owned by George Nelson of Woodbridge.

Boynton Beach/Sewaren Land and Water Club

Due to the foresight of a Woodbridge manufacturer, Cassimer Whitman Boynton who purchased waterfront land on the Arthur Kill in what is now Sewaren, local property was transformed into a beach resort in 1877. When it opened, Boynton Beach featured a bathing beach with beach houses. Pony rides and various amusement rides including a Ferris wheel, merry-go-round and a small roller coaster provided entertainment options for patrons. Other activities included a shooting gallery, bowling alley, nickelodeon, and hot air balloon rides.

The Beach also featured a dance Pavilion called Pierce's Point where a live orchestra band performed every Saturday night. A restaurant staffed with New York City chefs along with ice cream shops, snack bars, and hot dog and soda stands provided a vast assortment of eateries for those who frequented the beach. The only item Boynton Beach did not feature was alcohol. Mr. Boynton was an ardent teetotaler and based his resort on temperance principles.

In 1892, the Sewaren Land and Water Club was established to provide social events such as banquets, casual parties, card games, formal balls, and regattas highlighted by yachting competitions at the club held on Smiths Creek near Boynton Beach. On August 31, 1900, the club hosted a "Smoker" Social in its clubhouse. The following poetic verse was inscribed on the advertisements for the event: "For a glass is good; and a lass is good; and a pipe to smoke in cold weather; and the world is good; and the people are good; and we're all good fellows together."

For decades, the resort was the only amusement area in Middlesex County and drew crowds from New York City. Automobiles becoming affordable to the general population made other New Jersey beaches more accessible. Consequently, Boynton Beach became less frequented and by 1914 the resort shut down. Three years later a fire destroyed most of the major structures including the restaurant and dance pavilion.

In 1927, the resort was sold to Shell Oil Company. Pollution made the beach hazardous for



Woodbridge Athletic Club Building, 1908.

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wthpct1669@hotmail.com

Brochure design by Brandon Powell

Photographs courtesy of Woodbridge Public Library.

Importance of Leisure Opportunities
Maintaining an active lifestyle is fundamental to a happy and healthy life. Recreational and leisure opportunities can foster community pride and bring people together. Whether it's a meeting place, a sports facility, or a community stage, recreational activities enhance the well-being and healthy development of participants and enhance community life. The ability to participate in "fun and games" on a town level serves as a thriving hub of activity for families, youth, senior citizens, and civic organizations meeting the needs of its residents.

The Need for Fun & Games in Woodbridge

During the early nineteenth century, Woodbridge Township was a rural community as was the case with most localities across the United States. Free time and recreational activities came at a premium due to farm labor and frontier living. From 1850 to the turn of the twentieth century, Woodbridge Township's transformation from rural to urban coupled with millions of Americans who migrated from rural to urban areas created a movement known as urbanization. During this same period, immigration added millions more to the urban population. Urbanization and later suburbanization created an enormous societal and diverse cultural change in Woodbridge.

The importance of providing leisure opportunities in Woodbridge Township became crucial with implementation of a standard 40-hour work week.

Colonia Country Club

Though golf achieved prominence in Scotland during the late 1800's, it was considered a novelty in the United States. In 1899, the Colonia Country Club was founded by its first directors Edward Savage, Edward G. Cone and Edward Pattison when they purchased fifty acres of land in Colonia from the Adams family. The initial nine-hole course was designed by Thomas Bendelow, a famous Scottish architect who immigrated to the US in 1892. Later the course was expanded to 18 holes in 1923 by Robert White. Colonia Country Club was and still is a meeting place for recreation and social activities such as parties, community meetings and local fundraising events.



Colonia Country Club circa 1890s

Flying in Woodbridge Township

The famous flight of the Wright Brothers' Kitty Hawk in 1903 inspired others to fly and build planes in Woodbridge. Former Fords resident Helen Barney Derewsky described how her father, Coleman John Barney, is listed in the Smithsonian Institute with the aviation pioneers. Originally Coleman moved from Perth Amboy to Fords so he would have room to build his first pacer plane and later a biplane. In 1927, he flew a plane he built for the Department of Commerce at Roosevelt Field. Later he flew the plane at Hadley Airport. During this time, he gave \$1.00 airplane rides in Woodbridge at a field near the present location of Woodbridge Center.

As the Woodbridge population expanded, the flying school was closed and 2 airports were built later in the Township. Shinn Airways opened in 1925 with 72 acres on Oak Tree Road and Wood Avenue. This airport included 2 runways and a hangar. After WWII, several veterans including Bee Haydu, a pioneering WASP, ran the airport and flight school under the banner Ruscoe's Flying Service. The airport closed in 1951 with the construction of the Garden State Parkway.

The other airport, Westfield Airport, was located on Lake Avenue in Clark-Colonia with 73 acres; it began operations in 1928. While it had 3 runways in Clark, the hangar and operations shack were located in Colonia. It hosted parachute jumps, air races and aerobatics as well as rides. It ceased operations in 1955 with the expansion of the Garden State Parkway and the increasing suburbanization of Colonia and Clark.

Woodbridge Speedway

The Woodbridge Speedway Racetrack, located off present day Highway 35, opened for racing on July 22, 1928, after several postponements. Built by Wilbert Blaine on the land where the current Woodbridge High School, WHS football stadium, and the Woodbridge Health Center now stand, the Speedway was supported by local leaders, the American Automobile Association (AAA), Washington, D.C., and the Lions Club.

One of the first drivers was Mike Hickson, 26 years old from Pittsburgh, who finished the board track race of 100 miles within one hour at an average speed of 90 miles an hour. Along with Hickson, Lou Schempp, another veteran driver, was also favored to win on opening day. Fourteen drivers competed in the 100-mile event at the Speedway. The winner would collect most of the day's \$4,000 purse. Senator Morgan F. Larson of New Jersey started the drivers on the half-mile board wood-oval track that was set with boards on their edges and turns that banked at 38 degrees making the track one of the most dangerous of its day. Considered to be the fastest track of its size in the United States, second to none of the Los Angeles track, some drivers completed a full lap in under 20 seconds.

As racing at the Woodbridge Speedway continued, thousands of spectators filled the poorly constructed wooden stands each Sunday when racing was held. Spectators dressed for the occasion-- women in their fancy dresses and bonnets and men in their Sunday best. The races attracted well-known racers such as Freddy Frame, winner of the 1932 Indy 500 and Mauri

Rose who won the Indy 500 following the War. Many local fans, along with spectators who traveled by special train from New York and Philadelphia, attended the races which were held on the board tracks. Through the years, the speed track raised serious concerns about its safety. The American Automobile Association, Lions Club, State and Township officials (all who had originally endorsed the raceway) were concerned over the safety of drivers and spectators.

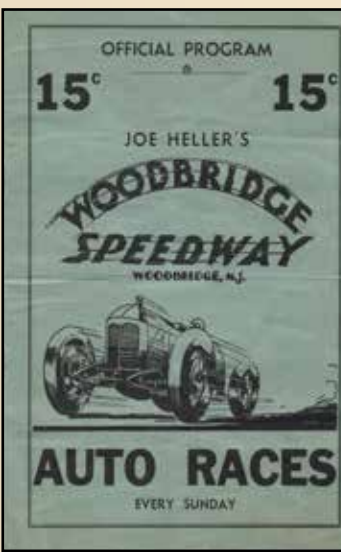
As the wood on the track began to disintegrate and safety became an issue, the wooden tracks were replaced by oil dirt in 1932. As the sport continued to grow in favor and excitement, lights were installed on the track to accommodate night racing in the 1930s, and barriers were erected to protect the spectators and drivers from harm should an accident occur. Thousands of fans filled the wooden stands each time racing was held. Soon, concern began to grow over the safety of the spectators as proximity of the stands to the track was too close. Several additional barriers were installed but they were not strong enough to protect the drivers and spectators in the event of a crash. Through all of this, even as drivers were informed of the dangers, they continued to participate, and the spectators continued to come.

Many well-known drivers perished on the Speedway tracks. These included Bob Robinson considered the dirt track "speed king" who perished in July 1930 when his car crashed through the guard rail and fell 30 feet to the ground. Others who perished on the Speedway tracks were Johnny Rohrer, 1929; Freddy Farmer, August 1932; Gus Iannacone, August 1934; Bernie Katz, May 1931; Bill Neapolitan, August 1932. Albert Lattanzio, 25 years old from New Brunswick was severely burned when his car caught fire during a race on the Speedway. He was pulled from his car by Joseph Berby who drove his own car into a railing and went to Lattanzio's rescue. Unfortunately, Lattanzio perished in that race. These well-known race car drivers were mourned throughout the United States as they were the best in their day.

Despite supporting the Speedway since its beginning, the Lions Club and the AAA were growing concerned over the fatalities on the Woodbridge Speedway of many of the seasoned, leading drivers of their day. Residents of the Township, the Prosecutor's office, and the Township Administration also voiced concern over the dangerous conditions on the track and began to act. The structure of the track, decaying portions of the track, continuing loss of life, weakening grandstands, influx of thousands of spectators into the Township without proper police protection and supervision, and the ongoing loss of life caused grave concern for Prosecutor Douglas M. Hicks. Despite improvements that the owners had made, a long list of necessary repairs and upgrades was presented to the Speedway owners who demanded that the issues be resolved before any racing would continue at Woodbridge Speedway. This decision was supported by Township officials the AAA, and the Lions Club who were very concerned about the safety of the drivers and the spectators. According to the May 22, 1931 edition of *Independent Leader*, the future of the Speedway would be decided by



Speedway Newspaper Clipping with Ticket



Speedway Program Cover

Leisure Opportunities in Woodbridge 1850-1950

WOODBRIDGE

Historic Tour of
Volume XV
Fun & Games:



Chartered 1669

Compiled by the Woodbridge Township Historic Preservation Commission

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