

*Chartered 1669*



Historic Tour of  
**WOODBRI**

Volume XVI

A Parade of Mayors Vol. I

*Compiled by the*  
Woodbridge Township Historic Preservation Commission

First Edition – 2024

## The Role of Mayors in Towns

Towns, townships, and cities within our country stand as embodiments of community spirit and social progress. Mayors play pivotal roles to promote unity in these communities and champion progress enriching the lives of their residents. By providing leadership, fostering economic growth, advancing local infrastructures, and serving the needs of their constituents, mayors wear many hats to ensure the prosperity and well-being of their towns.

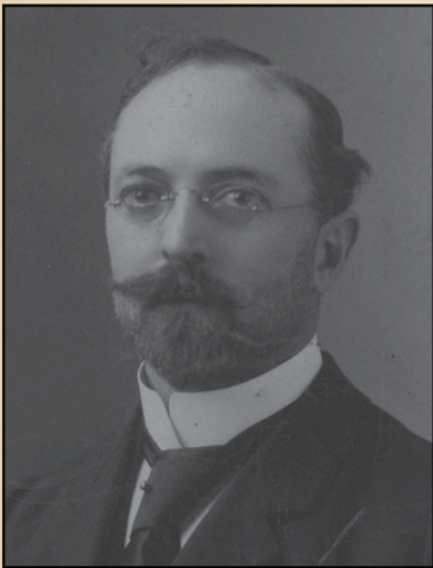
## Early Need for Mayors in Woodbridge

When Woodbridge Township was granted its Charter in 1669, the Governor of East Jersey gave our newly formed township the provision to choose its own magistrate that would later be recognized as the mayor of Woodbridge. These leaders needed to navigate the early progress of Woodbridge while maintaining harmony and enhancing the lives of its residents. As the face of the community, mayors shouldered the responsibility of working with council members and fiscal officers while communicating as liaisons with governmental entities outside of the town.

The parade of mayors begins with this first of two volumes highlighting the accomplishments of the Woodbridge Township Mayors from 1911-1967 and how they led the charge by initiating programs, exhibiting crisis leadership, voicing township aspirations, and bolstering local pride for future generations.

## First Mayors in Woodbridge

Prior to the charter organization in 1964, Woodbridge did not have an independently elected mayor. Voters selected committeemen to represent them and the committeemen voted on a chairperson. The Chairperson of the Township Committee was sometimes referred to by the honorific title "Mayor."



In 1911, **Alfred P. Cranston**, a Colonia resident and former postmaster with

the Postal Telegraph Building Company, was named Mayor of Woodbridge Township. Mr. Cranston spearheaded many initiatives to construct first class highways in the township as well as in Middlesex County serving as its State Delegate in Trenton. As a former member of the Woodbridge School Board, Alfred Cranston was credited with many educational advancements within Woodbridge Township including the opening of Woodbridge High School on September 11, 1911.

**John S. Dooley** followed Mr. Cranston in 1912. Mr. Dooley served as a Democratic Township Committeeman for twelve years. Prior to his mayoral duties, he was the Woodbridge Township Building Inspector.

After **Mr. Alexander** served a one-year term in 1913, **Drury W. Cooper** took over the mayoral duties in 1914. Mr. Cooper was proactively involved in charitable affairs. As mayor, he opened his home to host a big garden party raising needed funds for the Permanent War Blind Relief Fund.

The following Chairmen succeeded Mr. Cooper taking on the mayoral role in Woodbridge Township:

**Mr. Waring** – 1915

**Michael Coll** – 1916-1917. Mr. Coll led Woodbridge Township when the United States entered World War I.

**John E. Breckenridge** – 1918-1919. Mr. Breckenridge oversaw the construction of General Hospital #3 in Colonia that treated wounded warriors from World War I.

**Howard R. Valentine** – 1920-1921. Mr. Valentine worked with the Woodbridge Police Department to purchase the 1st motorized truck.

**E.W. Christie**, employed as a mechanical engineer, was voted mayor for two consecutive one-year terms from 1921-23. According to a 1923 article in The Bulletin of Woodbridge Township, Christie was "well-liked and loved for his fairness and excellent judgement" earning him the nickname "Pops" Christie.

**Leon E. McElroy** followed "Pops" Christie in 1923.



The Home of Alfred P. Cranston

## Mayor Louis Neuberg (1923-1925)



Committeeman-at-large Louis Neuberg was elected Mayor of Woodbridge Township in November 1923. Mayor Neuberg immediately established two new committees: the Zoning Committee and the Water Committee.

The Zoning Committee was established to sectionalize the township and to address the rapid growth of residents and businesses in Woodbridge. This was achieved by regulating land use and development within specific jurisdictions to maintain the integrity of the community and promote ongoing growth.

In response to a two-year statewide water shortage issue, the Water Commission was formed. Prior to this formation, water issues rested solely with the elected officials on the town committee. Establishing this committee, Mayor Neuberg made sure that important matters related to our water would be settled by a non-partisan body.



Woodbridge Township Committee 1924

During Mayor Neuberger's administration, bids were accepted for a new townhall. Under the direction of its general chairman David A. Brown, the new townhall opened on June 14, 1924 with an all-day celebration. The old townhall was sold to the Woodbridge Fire Co.

Also on Mayor Neuberger's agenda was the reorganization of the police department which involved increasing its staff and raising salaries comparable to neighboring towns. Many new positions were created in the department including three desk sergeants to maintain 24-hour a day coverage.

The township's first service club, the Rotary, was formed in 1924. Mayor Neuberger's final accomplishment of his two-year term was to oversee a new addition to Woodbridge High School (which is now Woodbridge Middle School on Barron Ave.) due to the growing population and increased student enrollment.

### Mayor William A. Ryan (1926-1933)



In the election of November 1925, William A. Ryan defeated Mayor Louis Neuberger as the Republican Party was swept out of office and the Democratic Party took control of the town government. Mayor Ryan who was born, raised, and educated in Woodbridge had strong ties to the township. Ryan attended St. James Parochial School and graduated from Woodbridge High School.

The Woodbridge National Bank building was erected on Main Street during Ryan's first term. Mayor Ryan found himself at odds with local engineers and attorneys by turning down various requests to widen local roads. Keeping true to his small-town roots, he was quoted as saying, he would "never sign his name to anything permitting a forty foot or larger street in the township."

After Mayor Ryan was reelected to his second term in November 1927, he immediately appropriated \$2,500 for library aide. Ryan also oversaw the addition of the Hopelawn School and the construction of Woodbridge Speedway that opened on the site where the present Woodbridge High School now stands. In 1928, the Lion's Club orga-

nized making it the township's second service club. After numerous hearings and some local opposition, the Shell Oil Company purchased most of the Boynton Beach property and came to Woodbridge Township to provide employment for many township residents.

Mayor Ryan kicked off his third term in 1929 by appointing a Park and Playground Committee. Headed by Bernhardt Jenson, this committee began work on the park system within Woodbridge Township. During Ryan's third term, the Woodbridge National Bank merged with the First National Bank to form the First National Bank and Trust Company.

In May 1929, Mayor Ryan represented Woodbridge on an executive committee with neighboring towns Union, Springfield, Westfield, Cranford, Garwood, Kenilworth, Roselle Park, Rahway, and Clark to plan a sanitary sewer system linking all the towns.

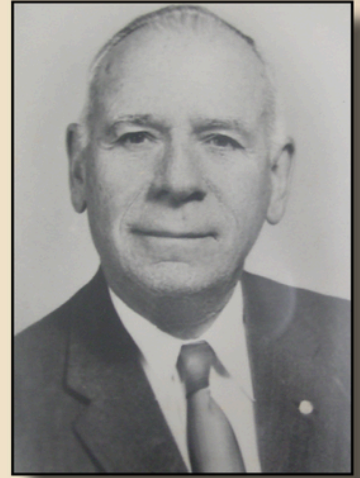
When "Black Tuesday" occurred on October 29, 1929, it signaled the beginning of the Great Depression. Woodbridge was unable to escape the repercussions of the Stock Market Crash. Mayor Ryan reacted to this national disaster by appointing an ad hoc citizen's committee on November 10, 1930, with representation from various civil, social, and industrial groups to address the unemployment crisis caused by the Great Depression.

After Mayor Ryan was elected to his fourth term in 1931, this citizen's committee set up a Relief Fund for the increased unemployment due to the closures of the clay mines and brick plants that were a major source of employment for township residents. Unfortunately, Woodbridge Township was unable to avoid the bank panic sweeping the nation leading to numerous bank failures, and consequently, the First National Bank and Trust Company was forced to close its doors.

Times proved extremely challenging for Mayor Ryan and the local elected officials since taxes were hard to collect and no one was able to buy municipal bonds being offered to infuse needed funds into the local economy. "Baby Bonds" were issued by the township in denominations of \$5.00, \$10.00, \$20.00, and \$25.00. Citizens were urged to purchase these bonds and Mayor Ryan endorsed local merchants, landlords and businesses to use these bonds the same as money. The Barron Library was forced to close due to lack of funds but opened on good faith a few weeks later.

William A. Ryan's final act as mayor was on October 18, 1933, declaring a "holiday" for Woodbridge Township in response to U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "bank holiday" initiated by the passage of the Emergency Banking Act, one of the many programs implemented by the New Deal.

### Mayor August Furman Greiner (1934-1951)



Mayor August Greiner and his Republican ticket swept Woodbridge Township's elections in November 1933 during the height of the Great Depression. He was a member of the Board of Governors for Perth Amboy General Hospital, and also was the President of the Greiner Funeral Home in Woodbridge.

His first step to start Woodbridge Township on the road to fiscal recovery was to incentivize the repayment of delinquent taxes and if the taxes were paid by January 31, 1934, all interest would be waived. Mayor Greiner successfully refinanced \$31,000 of defaulted bonds, saving the township from New Jersey State supervision and ultimately from bankruptcy.

Woodbridge Township became the first municipality in the county to install radio communications. The economy began to improve with more building permits resulting in an increase of jobs. This rejuvenated economy coupled with a tax rate stabilization contributed to Mayor Greiner's successful reelection in 1935.

After closing more than five years earlier, the First National Bank and Trust Company reopened. A \$120,000 federal grant application was approved by President Roosevelt for the Middlesex County Girls Vocational High School. Woodbridge Township's first ambulance went into service paving the way for the future of First Aid Squads throughout the township.

Mayor Greiner served as the President of the Mayors Association of Middlesex County. He led this Association to advocate the hiring of local unemployed residents, avoiding the tactics of public works contractors to import cheaper labor.

August Greiner won his next two mayoral elections in 1937 and 1939 running unopposed.

As the decade ended, Mayor Greiner appointed a special committee to serve in the Home Defense Program under the direction of the New Jersey State Governor.



**Greiner Defense Council**

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Woodbridge joined the rest of the nation to support the war efforts. In 1941, Mayor Greiner was named Chairman of the Defense Council. The council divided the township into 16 zones and began registering all town residents and appointing Air Raid Wardens for these zones. Greiner declared specific days to collect all aluminum to be donated for national defense.



**Greiner Defense Council**

Mayor Greiner, who was very active with the Red Cross during the war years, spearheaded a permanent Red Cross Headquarters to open on Main Street. As a World War I veteran, he pledged his support to help servicemen and women return to their homes in Woodbridge and retain their jobs. He also officiated the memorial dedication at Woodbridge Park honoring all the township residents who perished during World War I and World War II.

Although Mayor Greiner was elected for his 8th term, for the first time in 14 years, in November 1947 the Democrats gained control of the Town Committee. During this term, Greiner laid the cornerstones for the Woodbridge Emergency Squad building, the Adath Israel Synagogue and Community Center, and the St. Joseph's Convent that would operate as a nursing home run by the Little Servant Sisters of the Immaculate Conception.

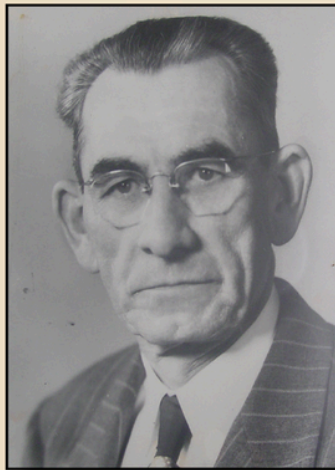
Mayor Greiner would go on to serve one more term, winning the mayoral election in November 1949. One of the most tragic events in Woodbridge Township history occurred during his final term. Police officers, firefighters, first aid workers and volunteers worked tirelessly under the direction of Mayor Greiner and Chief Keatin, to remove the injured and deceased from the tragic Woodbridge railroad train wreck on February 6, 1951.

In 1951, Mayor Greiner announced that he would not seek another term.



**Quigley & Greiner Attending a Party 1951**

**Mayor Hugh B. Quigley (1952-1959)**



With no change of mayors in nearly two decades, Hugh B. Quigley took the oath of office in 1952. He had served as plant manager at Shell Oil Company since it moved its plant to Sewaren in 1928.

The township saw much industrial growth during Mayor Quigley's eight years in office. He officiated the openings of the Fire Brick Company's \$1,500,000 plant, Christensen's Department Store, and the Ronson Corporation Industrial offices and warehouse on Route 1. Also on Route 1, S. Kleins built its department store while Two Guys renovated its building with two large front additions.



**Quigley at Christensen's Ribbon Cutting**

The Army National Guard Armory was constructed in Woodbridge with \$338,000 from federal funds through the Department of Defense. Churches in the township were also a focal point. St. Anthony's Church in Port Reading added a 42-foot extension. St. Cecelia's Church in Iselin was torn down for a major renovation of St. Cecelia's School. Our Lady of Carmel was built at a cost of \$332,000. The Hungarian Reformed Church constructed a new building, and St. John Vianney in Colonia announced its construction plans.



**Quigley and Captain Kurt Carlsen in a Parade 1952**

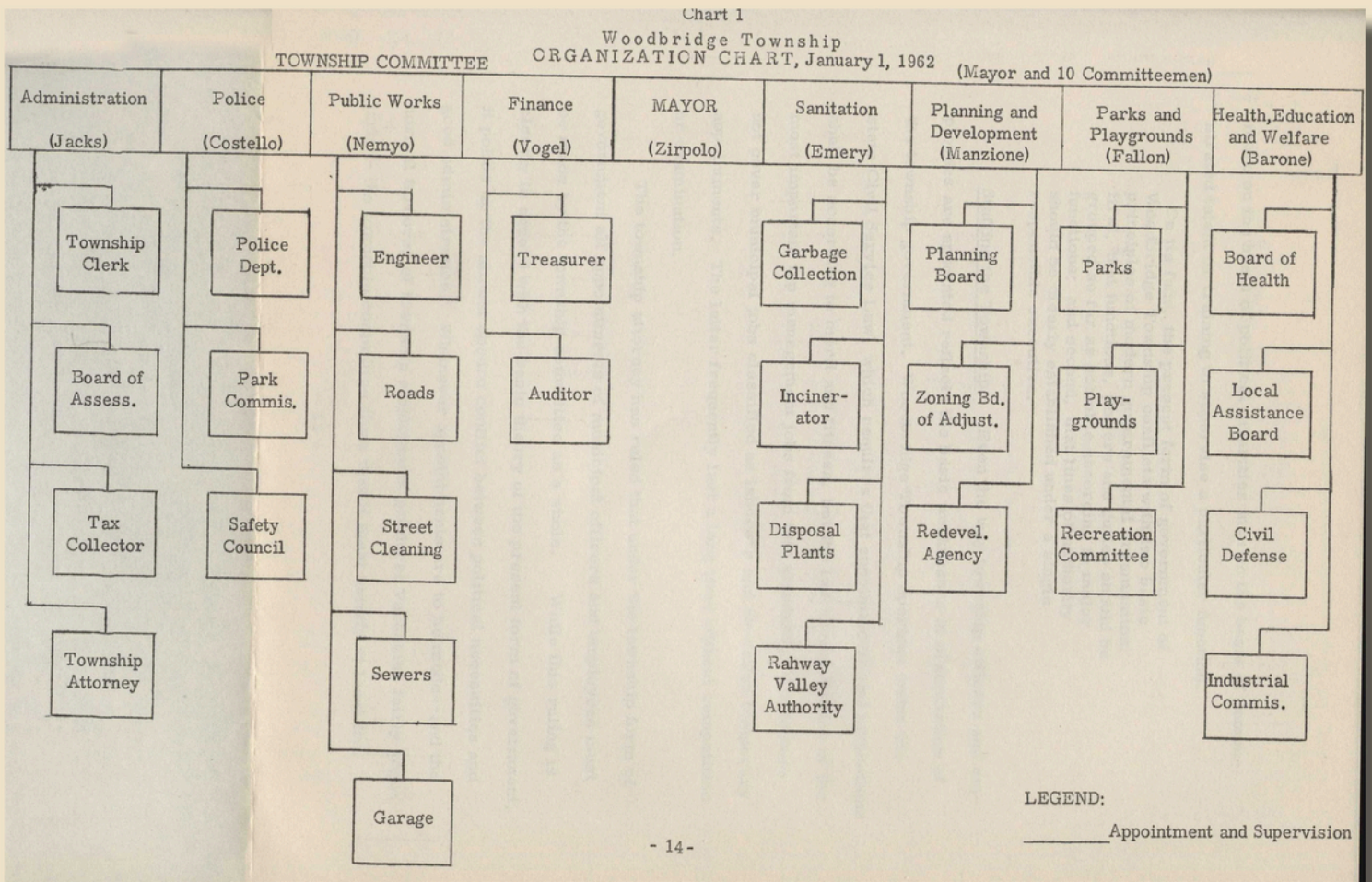
In addition, the Woodbridge Board of Education approved plans for three junior high schools and five new elementary schools with Schools No. 21 and No. 22 opening their doors while Hugh Quigley was mayor.



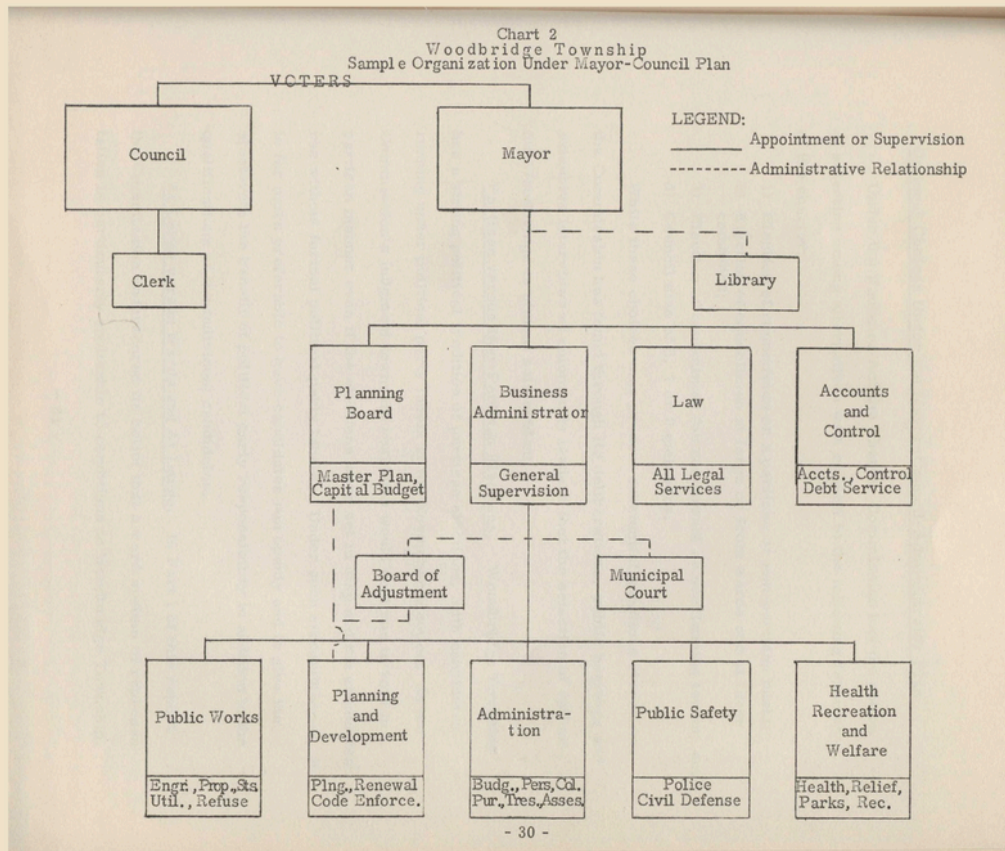
**Quigley with WHS Students 1953**



**Quigley at a Social Function 1952**



**Woodbridge Township Committee Organization**



**Woodbridge Township Sample Organization**



**John F. Kennedy & Quigley  
at Majestic Lanes**

**Mayor Frederick M. Adams  
(1960-1961)**



Serving as Committeeman-at-large during Mayor Quigley's tenure, Republican Frederick M. Adams took over as Woodbridge Mayor on January 1, 1960. While he only served one term, significant changes occurred in those two years.

Along with the Township Committee, Mayor Adams hired Woodbridge Township's first Business Administrator in 1960. The town's corporate infrastructure experienced major growth with central headquarters for the New Jersey Highway Authority newly located in Woodbridge. Elizabeth Consolidated Gas Company completed construction in Iselin. Premier Die Casting opened in Avenel, and Hess Trading and Transportation in Port Reading received a three-million-dollar addition.

Adam's term did not come without some internal struggles. A battle that began six years earlier over the free school lands ended in 1961 when the Township Committee voted 6 to 4 to retain these lands as an Industrial Park owned by the Township. Adams faced another challenge in 1961 when Port Reading and Sewaren wanted to secede from Woodbridge Township and incorporate as part of Warren. After a heated battle, the Courts ruled they

could not secede from the Township.

Toward the end of Mayor Adams' term, he adopted an ordinance to create a Charter Study Commission to review the current form of the Township's government. Under the Study Commission's recommendation, a mayor and nine council members form of government was approved under the Faulkner Act which is the current form of local government that remains today in Woodbridge Township.

**Mayor Walter Zirpolo (1962-1967)**



In 1961, Democrat Walter Zirpolo defeated Mayor Adams. During the next six years as mayor, Woodbridge Township experienced continued growth. Since 1932, Woodbridge High School had been on double sessions and with grade schools on double sessions in 1950. During Mayor Zirpolo's administration, two more high schools, one junior high school and two elementary schools were added eliminating the township of double sessions with the student body no longer attending school in two separate shifts each day. One of the high schools was named John F. Kennedy Memorial High School following President Kennedy's assassination in 1963.

Organizations were formed during Zirpolo's first term including the Citizen Library Council, the Industrial Commission, and a community renewal program named Project Bowtie that encompassed 106 acres making it the largest rehabilitation project in New Jersey. Mayor Zirpolo appointed Joseph A. Galassi as the first Police Director in the township. These achievements combined with Woodbridge Township taxes decreasing for the first time in township history contributed to Mayor Zirpolo's reelection in 1963.

Zirpolo began his second term establishing the Mayor's Council by separating the executive and legisla-

tive functions of the local government making the mayor responsible for executing and administering the policies established and legislated by this newly formed council. A third floor was added to the townhall to support the township's growth, making room for the Division of Planning and the Parks and Recreation Department. The library system also realized growth with Edwin P. Beckerman named director of the new library system.

Immediately after Mayor Zirpolo's second reelection, the Woodbridge State School, an institution housing developmentally disabled citizens, was dedicated in 1965. Woodbridge Township maintained its corporate growth during Mayor Zirpolo's third term. Ronson Corporation added a 34,000 square foot addition to its location, Kuhlman Dining Car Company was built in Avenel and Bildisco Wholesale Building Products Co. moved its facility to Avenel on Blair Road. In 1966, Zirpolo oversaw the dedications of Coopers Towers Senior Citizen Housing project and the Iselin First Aid Squad.

Mayor Zirpolo abruptly resigned in the spring of 1967 during an investigation for the township approval for Colonial Pipeline Corporation and its pipeline easement and approval of its oil tank facility in Woodbridge. After politics, Walter Zirpolo owned and operated The Club, a fitness and health center in Woodbridge and founded a supermarket group in central New Jersey.

## **Future of Woodbridge Township Mayors**

The Woodbridge Township Charter Commission in 1962 concluded "it is essential that a local government be established which can provide unity in leadership and policy at the same time to recognize diversity in the origins and interests of the people." The early mayors had the challenging task of charting Woodbridge's future. Their vision and strategies guided the township for future success. These accomplishments would be led by a succession of mayors beginning in 1967 and leading Woodbridge Township into the 21st Century presented in the upcoming brochure Woodbridge Township: A Parade of Mayors Vol. II.



**WOODBRIDGE TOWNSHIP  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

BARRON ARTS CENTER  
582 RAHWAY AVENUE  
WOODBRIDGE, NJ 07095

## Woodbridge Township Historic Preservation Commission

The mission of the Woodbridge Township Historic Preservation Commission is to inform, educate, advise and unite public officials and the community at large as an advocate for the preservation of the rich history of Woodbridge Township.

### Commission Members

Dr. Dolores Capraro  
Gioffre, Chairperson  
Courtney Lowry,  
Vice Chairperson  
Bruce Christensen

Julie Cohen  
Daniel D'Arcy  
Daniel Dias  
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Amy Wright

John A. Lande  
Miguel Martin  
Frank Pelzman  
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Township Historian

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Old Town Hall

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