



As America turns 250, the Point Pleasant Historical Society works to preserve a town whose roots reach back to the Revolution



BY DR. CHERYL ROBINSON

PHOTOS BY JILLIAN MORRIS PHOTOGRAPHY



◀ The Herman Bennett Cabin



Richard Morris ▶

No matter where you are in Point Pleasant on a July evening, you can hear it.

The distant screams from Jenkinson's rides. The familiar sounds of arcade games spilling onto the boardwalk. The smell of funnel cakes drifting through the summer air. Families carrying beach chairs home. Kids squeezing in one last ride before bedtime.

For generations, these have become the sounds, sights and traditions that define summer at the Jersey Shore. But long before the boardwalk, before the rides, before fireworks, Point Pleasant was something very different.

As America celebrates its 250th anniversary, communities across the nation are reflecting on their place in the country's story. While Point Pleasant and Point Pleasant Beach may be known today for their beaches, fishing boats and summer traditions, their roots stretch back to the earliest chapters of American history.

A HOME OLDER THAN THE NATION

During the Revolutionary War, Point Pleasant was not part of Ocean County. In fact, Ocean County did not yet exist. What is now Point Pleasant and Point Pleasant Beach was part of Shrewsbury Township in Monmouth County, a vast area that stretched from the Navesink River south to the Mullica River. The shoreline looked dramatically different than it does today, but the region played a role in the fight for American independence. British troops and Loyalists repeatedly targeted salt works operating near the Manasquan Inlet, then known as Squan Inlet. Salt was essential for preserving food, making these small coastal operations a valuable resource for the Patriot cause. British forces destroyed the facilities multiple times, and local residents rebuilt and guarded them so supplies could continue flowing to the Continental effort.

The war also highlighted another challenge facing the young nation. British naval blockades disrupted trade, military supplies and transportation along the coast. In response, American leaders

envisioned a protected inland waterway connecting communities along the Eastern Seaboard. That idea eventually became the Point Pleasant Canal, although it would take nearly 150 years before the canal finally opened in 1925.

SAVING THE BENNETT CABIN

But even before the nation secured its independence, people were building lives here. Point Pleasant's oldest surviving home, built in 1768 by Welsh ship captain Robert Morris, still stands today along Route 88. More than two and a half centuries later, it remains a living connection to the town's colonial past.

Richard Morris, a descendant of the home's original owner, still lives there today. A retired educator, museum curator, and long-time member of the Point Pleasant Historical Society, Richard has spent decades caring for the 1768 home while preserving not only his family's history but also the town's.

"It's got a big barn in the backyard that's two and a half stories high," he explains. "When I was in college, I refinished the barn, put new siding on the outside. Once I got out of college, I needed a place for my shop, so I used the barn. My shop is still there, but it's full of antiques, and a good part of the stuff that's here came out of the barn or out of my attic."

For Richard, preserving local antiques has always been about protecting pieces of Point Pleasant that might otherwise disappear. One of his most notable preservation efforts involved the historic Bennett Cabin, now located at Riverfront Park. After learning that the structure was scheduled for demolition, the former Point Pleasant Boro High School woodshop teacher stepped in.

After Herman Bennett's death, Richard served on the committee that preserved the historic cabin. With friends' help, they carefully dismantled the structure log by log. The cabin remained in storage for eight years before being reconstructed at Riverfront Park. The restoration took two years to complete, and ▶





today the Bennett Cabin has become an important part of Point Pleasant's heritage.

"At Christmas time we hold a party over there for all the kids in the local towns," Richard shares. "We have people come from as far away as Long Branch. We have trains set up in the cabin. We have homemade hot chocolate and homemade cookies while they're waiting in line. Then they come in, walk around, look at the trains, get as much hot chocolate and cookies as they want, go in to see Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus, and they all get a gift from Santa."

While the Bennett Cabin connects residents to the town's past, another landmark has been creating memories for generations on a much larger scale—the boardwalk.

THE RISE OF THE BOARDWALK

As the nation grew, so did the communities along the Manasquan River and Atlantic coastline. The arrival of the railroad in 1880 transformed the area into a destination for visitors seeking sea breezes and summer recreation. Point Pleasant Beach became its own municipality in 1886, separating from Brick Township, while Point Pleasant Borough became an independent municipality in 1920.

The shoreline that visitors know today also began taking shape during this period. A small beachfront pavilion appeared in 1880, followed by the area's first boardwalk in 1890. The structure was little more than a portable wooden walkway and lasted only two years before succumbing to the elements. A permanent boardwalk followed in 1915, laying the foundation for what would become one of New Jersey's most recognizable shore destinations.

By the 1950s, Jenkinson's had become part of everyday summer life for local kids like Richard, whose first paying job was working there as a teenager. What began as a collection of seaside attractions slowly grew into the boardwalk destination families know today.

"The monkey cages were another thing to draw people to the inlet," Richard recalls. "They also had an arcade, a candy stand and rides. They kept adding more attractions until it became a big thing."

PRESERVING POINT PLEASANT'S STORY

Point Pleasant's history has never lived in one place. It exists in buildings, photographs, family names, old yearbooks and the stories people still remember well enough to tell. That is where the Point Pleasant Historical Society comes in.

The museum has become a place where residents can reconnect with family stories, uncover forgotten photographs and donate pieces of local history that might otherwise be lost. Richard recalls helping residents trace their roots through yearbooks, photographs, and carefully collected artifacts passed down over generations.

"It's a place where people can find out information about their ancestors, and a place to bring things that aren't going to end up in a dumpster or a yard sale somewhere," he says.

One of the museum's standout pieces is an original jail cell door from Point Pleasant's first municipal building, which once stood near Route 88 by Ocean Road School, where Dunkin' Donuts is located today. For Fred Potter, longtime museum volunteer, the piece is especially personal: his grandfather, who served as police chief in the 1920s, used to open and shut that very door.

As America marks its 250th anniversary, the Point Pleasant Historical Society hopes more residents will become involved in preserving the town's legacy for future generations.

Many of the organization's volunteers are retired residents who have dedicated years to collecting artifacts, digitizing photographs and helping visitors research family histories. Society members say they would welcome younger volunteers interested in carrying that

work forward, even people in their sixties. The group wants to ensure Point Pleasant's history continues to be shared long after today's caretakers are gone.

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HISTORY BEYOND THE MUSEUM WALLS
Keeping local stories alive does not happen only inside museums. It also happens in classrooms. For the past two decades, Point Pleasant Borough High School history teacher Naomi Switzer has helped students connect with the past through firsthand stories. This year, rather than asking students to find interview subjects on their own, she brought history directly into the classroom by inviting members of the Point Pleasant Historical Society, Vietnam veterans and others who lived through significant moments in American history to share their experiences. The project gave students the opportunity to speak directly with people whose stories extend beyond the pages of a textbook.

“To hear from somebody who lived it or experienced a historical event in whatever way is so much more impactful,” she shares.

The experience also created a bridge between generations. Students listened to stories, asked questions and wrote thank-you notes afterward. Naomi says many came away talking about how much they enjoyed the conversations and the opportunity to learn from people



For more information on the Historical Society, visit pphsm.org

willing to share their experiences. By inviting members of the Historical Society into the classroom, she is helping ensure that local legacy is not simply preserved in photographs and artifacts but passed directly from one generation to the next.

Over the last century, Point Pleasant and Point Pleasant Beach weathered storms, fires, economic changes and periods of tremendous growth. Through it all, the community maintained the same qualities that continue to draw families here today: resilience, connection and a deep appreciation for life along the water.

Two hundred and fifty years after the birth of the United States, Point Pleasant's story serves as a reminder that American history was never written only in places like Philadelphia, Boston or Yorktown. It was also written in small coastal communities. As residents gather this summer for fireworks, parades and anniversary celebrations, they will be celebrating more than a nation. They will be celebrating the people, places and stories that helped shape Point Pleasant into the community it is today. 🌅





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By **Fred Potter**

The Point Pleasant Canal Turns 100 Years Old

The Point Pleasant Canal turned 100 last December. Originally opened in 1925 to connect the Manasquan River with the Barnegat Bay, it was first called the Bay Head Manasquan Canal.

The Canal and other inland waterways were planned at the Nation's founding.

During the Revolutionary War (1775–1783), British forces established blockades that affected trade, military supplies, and troop movements. Consequently, plans were made for the Inter-coastal Waterway to provide a

route from the Northern Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico, enabling traders to avoid the Atlantic Ocean. This plan would later link Barnegat Bay with the Atlantic Ocean.

NOT THE ORIGINAL ROUTE

In 1826, the US Congress authorized a survey to plan a series of inland canals along the east coast for the Inter-coastal Waterway. In 1833, the New Jersey Legislature established the Manasquan River and Barnegat Bay Canal Company to connect Barnegat Bay with the Manasquan River. The initial route was designed to pass through areas now known as Twilight Lake in Bay Head and Lake of the Lilies, Little Silver Lake, and Lake Louise in Point Pleasant Beach. In 1912, plans shifted to the

the canal was still dry in 1924. In 1986 it was replaced with a modern lift bridge and named the Veterans Memorial Bridge.

The original swing-out-style Lovelandtown Bridge located on Bridge Avenue (NJ Route 13) was not built until 1929 and in fact collapsed in 1962. In 1972 it was replaced with a modern lift bridge similar to the Route 88 Canal Bridge.

A FITTING NAME

Point Pleasant Borough officials, noting that the waterway lies entirely within their jurisdiction and seeking greater association with the Canal, petitioned Congress in 1964 to change its designation from the "Bay Head Manasquan Canal" to "The Point Pleasant Canal." The request was approved, resulting in the canal's current name.

TRANSFORMING A COMMUNITY

We often take the Canal for granted as though it was always there. Yes, we certainly think of it when we are stuck in traffic when one of its bridges goes up, or watching the boats with your fishing pole, or when you're trying to survive the waves and currents in your boat.

The fact is the Canal transformed our community into a haven for pleasure boaters and fishermen. It opened the Ocean to boaters in the upper Barnegat Bay and the Metedeconk River. In turn, it opened the Barnegat Bay and the Metedeconk River to boaters in the Manasquan River and to travelers sailing the Atlantic Ocean. The boat traffic in the Canal in the summer is simply amazing. Our lagoons and shorelines are riddled with pleasure boats of all types and sizes.

Let's be thankful it was built and say Happy Centennial Birthday to the Point Pleasant Canal.

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current canal site, which was chosen for its lower construction costs and reduced the number of bridges needed from eight to two.

Construction on the Canal began in 1916 with a \$30,000 appropriation from the NJ Legislature but was soon halted due to World War I after only half a mile was completed. Work resumed in 1918

following emergency defense funds, yet progress remained slow over seven years because limited State appropriations caused frequent project delays and contractor changes.

THE CANAL'S BRIDGES

The original Route 88 Bridge was a bascule-style lift bridge and was constructed while

