

ABERDEEN TOWNSHIP  
THEN AND NOW

Aberdeen Township derived its name from "New Aberdeen," a name for a settlement established in Northwestern Monmouth County in the 1680's by Friends and Presbyterians who fled Scotland to avoid religious persecution.

Settlement began about 12,000 years ago when people who migrated eastward from Siberia spread throughout the Americas. Those who settled in this area developed into the Lenni-Lenape. About the year 1000, an agricultural society developed, and small villages dotted what was to become New Jersey. The Lenape began a westward retreat in the face of European settlement and disease beginning in the late seventeenth century, beginning in Monmouth County by the mid-eighteenth century. Although the Lenape presently live in Ontario and Oklahoma, their legacy survives in such names as Mohingson, Luppatatong and Matawan Creeks, and Raritan Bay.

The earliest known attempt at European settlement was in 1650 under the Dutch, when the south side of Raritan Bay was purchased from the Lenni Lenape. No known attempt was made to make good on settling this, and in 1664 the entire area came under English possession. The earliest English land grant in Aberdeen was in 1677 when Sir George Carteret granted 36 acres to Jonathan Holmes. This is in present-day Oak Shades on Mohingson Creek.

In 1684, Surveyor General Thomas Rudyard received a grant of 1038 acres on Raritan Bay and Matawan Creek, the present Cliffwood and Cliffwood Beach. Owing to Rudyard's high office, this was quite controversial, and in 1685 the Board of Proprietors issued an order regarding the laying out of land. Section 7 addressed questionable activity such as Rudyard's, and he sold his land to his son-in-law, Samuel Winder.

The 1680's saw an influx of Scottish immigrants fleeing religious persecution in response to a 1683 book by George Scott extolling the virtues of Scottish settlement in East New Jersey. In 1701, a village site of 100 acres was granted by the Proprietors to 24 Scottish settlers of the area. These men and six others also purchased a landing site on Matawan Creek.

The village site eventually came to be called Mount Pleasant, and the landing, as it became an important shipping point for the produce of Middletown Township, became Middletown Point. A third, very scattered settlement developed in the eighteenth century west of Matawan Creek, and was called Matawan or Matavan.

Since 1693, what was to become Aberdeen Township remained part of Middletown Township, which, at the time, consisted of Aberdeen, Holmdel, Hazlet, Middletown including Sandy Hook, Matawan Borough, Keyport, Union Beach, Keansburg, Atlantic Highlands, Highlands, and a sliver of Colts Neck. Originally extending as far northwest as Cheesequake Creek, that portion being ceded to Middlesex County in 1710.

By 1848, Middletown was considered too large and unwieldy, and legislation was passed dividing it into two halves, the western half to be a new municipality, Raritan Township. In 1857, Raritan was further divided. Legislation sponsored by Assemblyman Beers passed the State Assembly and Senate, was signed by Gov. William A. Newell, and on Feb. 23, 1857, Matavan Township was incorporated. This included the villages of Middletown Point, Mt. Pleasant, and Matavan. The township was named for the creek as well as the village of Matavan. The spelling of "Matawan" or "Matavan" had been interchangeable, however when the act was published "Matavan" had been used.

In 1865, due to postal confusion with Middletown, the Middletown Point post office was renamed "Matawan," to reflect the name of the township. (This section is the present downtown area of Matawan Borough.) In 1882 the spelling of the township was officially changed to "Matawan."

When the railroads were built in the 1870's, several stations were established. As the station at Main Street was to be Matawan, the one at Cliffwood Avenue had to be something else, although the old name, "Matavan" was still applied to that area. To avoid near duplication, Hutschler's Crossing was briefly used; the railroad then changed the station to "Cliffwood," after the coastal area of the Township.

In 1885 the Cliffwood post office was established and the name of the old Matavan settlement passed into obsolescence. That same year, the former Middletown Point section, which had adopted the name "Matawan," was incorporated by referendum as the Borough of Matawan. Originally a self-governing district within the township, the borough gained full municipality status in 1896.

In response to demand, in 1889 a post office was established at Mt. Pleasant. As that name was in use elsewhere, a new name was needed. "Freneau" was chosen, in honor of Philip M. Freneau, the "Poet of the Revolution", a former Mt. Pleasant resident who is buried in the area. (This post office has since been closed.)

The twentieth century saw several major developments in the township. The 1920's gave us Cliffwood Beach; originally a resort community; after World War II year round homes were the norm. River Gardens developed in the late 1940's, and the sixties saw Strathmore, which more than doubled township population and transformed a farming community into a bustling suburb.

On November 3, 1964, the citizens voted to change the Township Committee form of government, in force since 1857, to the Council Manager form, under the Optional Municipal Charter Law (Faulkner Act). A seven-member Township Council, including the Mayor, are elected at large for staggered, four-year terms of office in partisan elections held in November.

On November 8, 1977, the residents of Matawan Township voted to change the name of the township to create a community identity separate from that of Matawan Borough. The residents voted to call their community Aberdeen Township. Officials believed the new name would draw attention to the Township, as it is listed first alphabetically among New Jersey's 567 municipalities.

Today, Aberdeen is a suburban township of 5.4 square miles

containing a mix of residences, light industry and shopping centers. Sections of the Township include Cliffwood, Cliffwood Beach, Freneau, Oak Shades, River Gardens, Strathmore and Woodfield. The population is approximately 17,000 and there are three postal zip codes which service the township: 07721, 07735, and 07747.

The Township is served by two volunteer fire companies, the Aberdeen Township Hose and Chemical Co. No. 1, organized in 1918, and the Cliffwood Volunteer Fire Co. No.1, organized in 1927. Two volunteer First Aid Squads respond to the community's emergency medical needs, namely the Aberdeen Township First Aid and Rescue Squad, organized in 1954, and the South Aberdeen Emergency Medical Service, organized in 1970. A full time, professional Police Department was established in 1935.

Council meetings are held on the first and third Tuesday of each month at 8:00 pm in the Municipal Building at One Aberdeen Square. The public is welcome to attend and is afforded the opportunity during the public portion of the meeting to offer any comments or to ask questions.