



Monmouth  
County  
Historical  
Association

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## Allen House

**Circa 1710, with Additions circa 1755-1760, 1970  
400 Sycamore Avenue, Shrewsbury, NJ 07702**

*To be sold. A good large Dwelling-House, two Story high, containing several Fire-Rooms well-finish'd, with a good Stone Cellar under it, and a large Kitchen and Milk-House joining to it. The Lot belonging to said House, consists of near four Acres of choice Land, upon which there is a very good young bearing Orchard, two Gardens, a good Stone Well, a large new Storehouse, Chaise House, Stable, and several other Outbuildings ....<sup>1</sup>*

In 1754, carpenter and Shrewsbury resident Josiah Halstead purchased the "good large Dwelling-House" with the intention of opening a tavern. Almost immediately, Halstead's tavern was one of the most successful in the area. But Halstead's success as tavern keeper would turn to failure as he found himself in debtor's prison, his property sold at public auction to pay his debts. The story of the Allen House, MCHA's fourth historic property, is inextricably entwined with Josiah Halstead's early success and eventual failure. The site's identity as a local tavern for more than half a century and its role in a dramatic moment of the American Revolution offers visitors a rare view of a local gathering place.

Between 1670 and 1688, Massachusetts-born Quaker Judah Allen (1650/1-1689) built a structure at the corner of the intersection of the Burlington Road (now Sycamore Avenue) and Broad Street. Little is known about Allen's house beyond the fact that a structure existed on the site. The dwelling was probably substantial, as Allen was an influential citizen. He was listed as a patentee in Shrewsbury in 1670 for which he received 272 acres of land. Allen served as deputy from Shrewsbury to the legislative Assembly of East Jersey in 1688.<sup>2</sup> The house itself was mentioned in the records of the Shrewsbury Friends Meeting as the site of an Allen family wedding in 1688.<sup>3</sup>

Sometime after 1700, New York City merchant Richard Stillwell (1671-1743) purchased the property from Judah Allen for use as a country retreat. Stillwell was a prominent figure in the founding of the New York Presbyterian Church in Manhattan. According to surviving records, Stillwell was an aggressive businessman; between 1720 and 1737, he brought suit against various persons on no less than ten occasions.<sup>4</sup> Stillwell married twice. His first wife, Debora Bowne, died sometime prior to 1708, bearing him no children. His second wife, Mercy Sands, whom he married in about 1708, gave birth to eight children. The family lived in their primary residence on Dock Street in Manhattan, traveling by ship to Shrewsbury to their new country home.

Soon after his purchase of the Allen property, Stillwell had a new house built. Wood testing done in 2005 indicates that the first floor joists of the house date from around 1710. Stillwell seems to have patterned his Shrewsbury home after several similar Staten Island houses with which he was familiar. In particular, Britton Cottage, originally built in circa 1670 and now part of Historic Richmond Town on Staten Island, and Stillwell's new house shared virtually identical floor plans. Stillwell's aunt, Ann Stillwell, married Nathaniel Britton, and it is reasonable to surmise that Richard Stillwell would have been familiar with their Staten Island home and chose it as the inspiration for his own house in Shrewsbury.<sup>5</sup>

Richard Stillwell died in 1743, leaving bequests of money and slaves to his first four children and gifts of money to his remaining children and wife. Mercy Stillwell died three years later.<sup>6</sup> Stillwell and his wife were buried across the street in the Presbyterian churchyard, just across the street from their Shrewsbury home. The Stillwell heirs

advertised the house and property twice in the New-York Gazette, once in March of 1752 and again in January of 1752.

The newspaper notice advertising the Stillwell property caught the eye and the imagination of Josiah Halstead. Halstead's meteoric rise to prosperity and his alarmingly rapid descent into financial ruin and social obscurity offers a glimpse into the perilous life of an eighteenth-century entrepreneur. Born in about 1719 in Orange County, New York, Josiah Halstead was still an infant when his father Timothy moved with his wife Margery and children Abigail, Timothy, Daniel, Josiah, and Pearson to Rumson Neck in Monmouth County.<sup>7</sup> Josiah received training as a carpenter from his father, and listed himself as such on his 1740 marriage license to Zilpha West.<sup>8</sup> Josiah's brother Timothy married Zilpha's sister Mary. Webley West, Zilpha's and Mary's father, owned the property on the southwest corner of the "Four Corners intersection," directly across the street from what would later become Halstead's tavern.<sup>9</sup>

Halstead was an active and involved member of Episcopal Christ Church, located on the southeast corner of Shrewsbury's "Four Corners," and was baptized there as an adult in 1738.<sup>10</sup> By 1747, Halstead was a member of the church's vestry, and at the height of his commercial success, Halstead and his family occupied a pew in the fifth row of the church, a clear indication of his prosperity.<sup>11</sup>

In 1754, Josiah and his wife Zilpha purchased the Stillwell property and began operating a tavern.<sup>12</sup> Halstead chose to name his establishment "The Blue Ball." Tavern keepers chose distinctive names for their locations, hanging brightly painted signs outside their inns for their patrons.<sup>13</sup> Halstead's reasons for the name of his tavern are unknown. Inn and tavern owners of the time continued the English tradition of using colorful or striking names for their establishments, often displaying brightly-painted signs outside the door to entice passersby. By choosing a second occupation as tavern keeper, Halstead joined one of the most strictly regulated occupations in New Jersey prior to the Revolution. By 1664, innkeepers were required to pay for a tavern license and fines were levied against those who operated taverns without one.<sup>14</sup> Prices of liquor, food, stabling, travelers' accommodations, levels of credit to customers, and the selling of liquor to servants, apprentices, and slaves were all rigorously controlled.<sup>15</sup>

Halstead began a series of improvements and enlargements to the structure soon after purchasing the Stillwell property. Comparison between the 1751 newspaper advertisement describing the Stillwell house and a 1774 advertisement describing the structure after Halstead's ownership indicates the nature of the improvements. Halstead added a kitchen wing to the west side of the house. The kitchen features a large brick fireplace with two beehive ovens, an unusual feature in a private residence but certainly necessary in a busy tavern. The kitchen wing also included a loft space above, probably used for sleeping quarters for Halstead's servants and slaves.<sup>16</sup> The fireplace wall now separating the main structure from the kitchen wing has exposed brick along the west facade, indicating that it was originally an exterior wall. Halstead also seems to have raised the roof of the Allen House, adding a full second floor to the structure during his approximately twenty-year ownership.<sup>17</sup>

The tavern business appears to have been an immediate success. In 1755, the year after Halstead opened the "Blue Ball," his excise taxes amounted to £3.4.2, the highest of the dozen or so tavern keepers in the Shrewsbury area. By contrast, local tavern keeper Philip Lewis paid £2.12.0 and innkeeper Nathaniel Parker was levied £2.6.0.<sup>18</sup> Halstead chose a seemingly ideal location for his public house, described as "... two miles from a public landing, where there is great commerce carried on thence to New York."<sup>19</sup> It was this close proximity to the Shrewsbury shore that supplied Halstead with the majority of his customer base. Local farmers and craftsmen would bring their produce and goods to the docks to be taken to New York, and then stopped by Halstead's establishment for refreshment. Shrewsbury did not have a regular stagecoach stop until very late in the eighteenth century, when nearby Long Branch rose in popularity as a destination for travelers.<sup>20</sup> Halstead evidently purchased much of his liquor and other supplies from Shrewsbury resident and New York merchant Joseph Holmes. Holmes was a most influential citizen in Shrewsbury and was one of the incorporators of Christ Church in 1738.<sup>21</sup> A partial ledger entry from Holmes' records list numerous goods purchased by Halstead for his establishment, including numerous gallons of rum, lemons, and "cyder."<sup>22</sup> The only document known to be written by Halstead himself asks Holmes for a fresh supply of rum:

*Shrewsbury May 24<sup>th</sup> 1762*

*Mr Joseph Holmes Sir*

*I send you by James Mount  
Thirty pounds cash please [sic] to pay for the  
Rum you bough[t] for me and I shall take  
it as [a] favor if you can send me one more  
for I am now out of Rum and Cannot  
Come this Week but soon hope to be  
there and Conclud[e] with by Best  
Respects to you and Famely [sic] from you[r]  
Most Humble Ser<sup>t</sup>*

*Josiah Halstead*

*PS Sunday morning[g] 5 oClock and no more  
Papper [sic] in the House<sup>23</sup>*

In 1754, the same year that Halstead purchased and opened his tavern, thirty-one-year-old Zilpha Halstead died and was buried in Christ Church cemetery. The couple had six children by this time, and it is likely that Zilpha's death was caused by childbirth-related complications.<sup>24</sup> Two of Josiah's and Zilpha's children are buried beside her: Timothy, named for Josiah's father and brother, who died in 1747 at seven months, and Mary, who died in 1761 at the age of fifteen.<sup>25</sup>

Josiah Halstead remarried the following year, this time to Anna Throckmorton. The couple had three children. One child, Margery, died in 1760 and was buried in Christ Church graveyard. Anna Halstead died in the same year, leaving Josiah a widower for a second time. Halstead remarried a third time in 1766 to Lydia Worthley and it appears that this union produced no children.

In addition to his wives and children, Halstead relied upon the help of his servants to assist him in running the tavern business. Halstead once placed an advertisement in the Pennsylvania Gazette offering a reward for the capture of his servant Jeremiah Myah, who evidently ran off with a good deal of Halstead's money. In 1763, Halstead placed another advertisement, this time offering a reward for his servant Edward May, who stole one of Halstead's horses.<sup>26</sup> The frequency with which Halstead had to advertise for runaway servants leads one to wonder what type of master he may have been.

It is also apparent that Halstead owned slaves. In a 1768 newspaper advertisement in which Halstead announced the public auction of his tavern property on April 20 of that year, the notice ended " ... One or more likely Negro boys to be sold, at private sale, the same time, or before, who can be well recommended."<sup>27</sup>

During the first years of his tavern business, Halstead became increasingly involved in Shrewsbury government. In 1758 he was elected as one of the town's Overseers of the Poor.<sup>28</sup> During his year-long tenure, Halstead was responsible for placing local indigent, elderly, handicapped, or ill men, women and children with other Shrewsbury townspeople, who would receive an agreed-upon fee for their care and feeding. Most communities had similar provisions in place for the care of the local needy.<sup>29</sup> In many cases, local households would "bid" for the responsibilities of caring for the infirm or indigent, the town placing such persons with the household willing to accept the lowest sum or fee for their care. The Shrewsbury Town Book lists orphans, single mothers and their infants, the elderly, and the infirm, both Caucasian and African American, along with those in whose care they were placed and the amounts paid by Shrewsbury.<sup>30</sup>

Halstead's tavern as a centrally-located public house helped him secure additional income in the form of rental fees for meetings of various local groups. The Monmouth County Circuit Court met at the tavern, paying for space for trials as well as for food and drink for judges, lawyers, and litigants.<sup>31</sup> Halstead was also a charter member of

the Shrewsbury Library Company, which met for the first time at the tavern in May of 1763. The Company continued to meet at the Blue Ball Tavern for twenty years.<sup>32</sup>

Even though Halstead enjoyed early financial success with his tavern business, economic events far beyond his control began to erode his accomplishment. Innkeeper Halstead was in financial trouble as early as 1765, when he advertised his tavern for sale in the 21 February issue of the Pennsylvania Gazette. Halstead's advertisement reveals the extent of his tavern and the surrounding property: "*A Compleat small Farm, lying in the Center of the Town a/Shrewsbury, New-Jersey, containing 56 acres of very good Land and Meadow, with a good Dwelling-House, Gardens, and Orchards of Excellent Fruit, Stables, and other Out-houses, all in good Repair, and in compleat order for a Tavern, it being the Place where the most noted One in Shrewsbury hath been kept for many Years, and is a proper place for a Store, Tradesman, or any other public Business ...*"<sup>33</sup>

While we cannot be certain as to specific reasons contributing to Halstead's financial decline, it is possible that he may have been unable to turn a profit due to the rigidly controlled tavern industry. Halstead may have suffered a relatively common fate as many colonial tradesmen in an economic system based largely on barter. Without ready cash, Halstead would have been unable to pay his excise license or purchase liquor or other goods from his New York suppliers.<sup>34</sup> According to Shrewsbury town records, Halstead's excise taxes showed a sudden marked drop, from a high of £3.6.0 in 1755 to £2.10.0 the following year.<sup>35</sup> Halstead again advertised his tavern in a 31 March 1768 newspaper, this time at a public auction scheduled for 20 April. His announcement had an almost desperate quality to it, but again, there were no buyers for Halstead's increasingly burdensome property.<sup>36</sup>

Even with financial troubles looming, Halstead was still able to maintain a busy schedule for his tavern during the following year, with numerous meetings of the Library Company. In 1769, Halstead was involved in the rebuilding project at Christ Church. Not only did he serve as consultant on construction matters, but he housed the workmen at his tavern during the activity.<sup>37</sup>

Halstead's prolonged financial difficulties came to a crisis in 1770. His name was added to the list of town delinquents after he was unable to pay his liquor excise tax. Interestingly enough, Halstead's brothers, Timothy and Daniel, were subsequently placed on the Delinquent's List in 1773, possibly as a result of attempting to assist their brother financially.<sup>38</sup> Halstead advertised his property for sale again in the same year, but was unable to find a buyer. By February of 1772, Josiah Halstead was placed in debtors' prison where he remained until March of the following year. A terse notice appeared in a New York newspaper, stating

*WHEREAS Josiah Halstead, of the town of Shrewsbury, and county of Monmouth, was discharged from his confinement by an insolvent act, and his estate assign'd to Joseph Leonard and John Longstreet, jun. for the use of his creditors; this is therefore to desire all his creditors to meet at the house of the said Halstead, in Shrewsbury, the 1 01h day of April next, to give orders to the said assignees how to dispose of said estate for the benefit of said creditors.*<sup>39</sup>

New Jersey's debtor laws strongly favored the creditor, allowing the imprisonment of an accused debtor simply at the word of an irate creditor. Debtors faced the seizure of their personal property as well as long-term incarceration if they failed to meet creditors' demands. Moves to reform such harsh legislation met with great resistance, and not until almost 1850 was the institution of debtors' prison finally abolished. A debtor was also burdened by the widely accepted belief that financial failure was the direct result of moral flaw or personal weakness.<sup>40</sup>

In 1773, Shrewsbury resident Stephen Tallman (d. circa 1790) assumed ownership of Halstead's property, probably in payment of debts owed by Halstead. Stephen Tallman's name appears frequently in Shrewsbury records. He was elected an Overseer of the Poor in 1766, eight years after Halstead himself. In 1774, Tallman placed an advertisement in a New York newspaper advertising the property: "... to be sold or let for one year or more ... the noted publick house, for public entertainment that hath been kept for upwards of 20 years, in the township of Shrewsbury."<sup>41</sup> Records indicate that Tallman, the son of Dr. Stephen Tallman of Point Pleasant, was evidently an unpleasant person, not well thought of by other Shrewsbury residents. He was brought up on assault charges more than once and was described in town records as an "...ill designing and disorderly person of a

wicked & malicious mind." In 1781, Tallman was accused of selling flour and Indian corn to "... the enemies of this state during the War."<sup>42</sup>

After his release from prison, Halstead rented his former tavern from the new owner in a last attempt to recoup his losses and recover his financial and personal stability. In the end, however, Halstead was unsuccessful. By April of 1775, Halstead was no longer associated with the Blue Ball Tavern. He apparently remained in the area, as his name appears in the Shrewsbury Library Company records until well into 1776.<sup>43</sup> His name appears a final time on August 3, 1776, when it was noted that he returned two volumes of the history of California and borrowed a history of England.

In the Shrewsbury Tax Ratables lists for 1779-81, Halstead is listed as virtually penniless, with no house, land, or animals to his name. He died in obscurity sometime around 1781. An undated Christ Church burial record contained mention of one "Joseph Halstead," noting that his headstone was "gone." As there are no other records mentioning Joseph Halstead, and the name does not appear in any other Shrewsbury records, it is likely that this was actually former tavern keeper and Christ Church member Josiah Halstead, his name incorrectly written in church documents.<sup>44</sup>

After assuming ownership of the Blue Ball Tavern, Stephen Tallman rented the property to William Lippincott, who continued the tavern business Josiah Halstead had so promisingly begun. It was during Lippincott's tenure that Allen House played host to a minor yet dramatic event during the American Revolution known as the "Allen House Massacre." During the summer of 1779, Shrewsbury was a hotbed of political strife between Tories loyal to Britain and Whigs supporting independence. Some Tory refugees-those who had their property confiscated by local Continental governments -turned to piracy, raiding up and down the Jersey Coast. Shrewsbury was a frequent target; in 1779 alone, at least nine separate raids were recorded.<sup>45</sup>

Among the raiders plying the Monmouth County coast that summer was Joseph Price, who had fled to the British Army sometime before 1779. At the time of the Allen House incident, Price was listed "on command" for the loyalist New Jersey Volunteers, indicating that he had permission to carry out raids and forage behind Continental lines.<sup>46</sup> A small contingent of Continental soldiers was stationed at the tavern, sent from Tinton Falls to observe the comings and goings of local Tories. Tavern keeper William Lippincott was himself a Whig, and the Blue Ball Tavern had been the site for several public meetings regarding the boycotting of British products. An advertisement was posted in and around Shrewsbury on 2 January 1775 stating "*The inhabitants of the town of Shrewsbury ... are hereby warned to meet at the house of Josiah Halstead ... on Tuesday the 17<sup>th</sup> of ... January at noon, in order to choose a committee for the several purposes as directed by the said Congress ...*"<sup>47</sup>

Word of the Continental occupation somehow reached Joseph Price, who headed for the tavern with four subordinates. Price was quite familiar with the layout of the Allen House -his wife, Abigail, was Josiah Halstead's second daughter.<sup>48</sup> After ascertaining that no sentries had been posted, Price and his men rushed the house and seized the weapons, which had been propped up in one of the first floor rooms. The Continental soldiers, upon hearing the commotion, attempted to regain control. In the ensuing scuffle, three of the twelve soldiers were bayoneted on the spot. Price and his men shattered the muskets against a tree and made their escape.<sup>49</sup> An account of the fatal skirmish was written by Lyttleton White, a Shrewsbury carpenter who had made repairs to the Allen House in 1814. White wrote his account of the massacre in reply to an 1845 newspaper advertisement placed by Daniel Veach McClean, Chairman of the Executive Committee and collections curator at the New Jersey Historical Society, seeking information about the history of New Jersey. White himself had good reason to know the story-he was the great-grandson of Joseph Price, leader of the attack on the tavern.<sup>50</sup>

The tavern continued to change hands at a rapid pace through the remainder of the eighteenth century. In the ensuing years, the original property shrank as portions of land were sold off by succeeding owners. Stephen Tallman found a buyer for the tavern, selling it to Judah Allen, a descendant of the property's original owner, in April of 1775.<sup>51</sup> In 1778, Judah Allen sold the property to Robert Bowne, described in documents as a "Merchant of the City of New York," for £500.<sup>52</sup> Between 1779 and 1785, William Lippincott continued to run the tavern, leasing it from Robert Bowne. In 1785, the property changed hands again, when brothers Benjamin and Robert White bought the tavern from Bowne. Between 1800 and 1814, at least six different men rented the property from

the Whites in attempts to operate a tavern. The license applications of John Morrell and Samuel Berry (1806), Calvin Griswold (1807), Ephraim Buck (1809), and Benjamin Lewis (1810), all describe the " ... well-known Comer house in Shrewsbury Town which has been occupied as an inn many years ...."<sup>53</sup> This rapid turnover rate was not unusual. While a successful publican could rely on a steady income, the industry in general was economically unstable for most of those who attempted it.<sup>54</sup> It was also during this time period that the earliest known view of the tavern and its locale was produced.

Benjamin and Robert White evidently had a great deal of trouble with their tenants. In his memoirs, Benjamin White described one incident:

*The corner house we rented for a tavern to a man named Joseph Vimk [Vaunk}. It was attended with so much trouble to collect the rent and keep the house in repair ... The house was on fire several times and would have burned down if I had not obtained help speedily. He was a bad man and I had many long law suits to get him out so I had it fixed in my mind to sell when a chance offered and I sold it to Corlies and Allen.<sup>55</sup>*

In June of 1814, Dr. Edmund Williams Allen, a descendant of original property owner Judah Allen as well as the Judah Allen who purchased the property in 1775, with friend and business partner Jacob Corlies, purchased the former Blue Ball Tavern for two thousand dollars. After the structure was repaired and altered, Allen moved in with his new bride.<sup>56</sup> Allen both lived and worked in the house, keeping a small medical office on the first floor. After his death in 1867, his son Joseph began a general store on the ground floor. Allen retired in the early 1880s. Local resident A. Holmes Borden then rented the space and ran a successful grocery and dry goods store for about twenty years. The house itself was by this time considered a local landmark; several postcards and a stereograph view showing the structure with Borden's attached store were made at the turn of the century.

A fire on 17 April 1914 destroyed the store wing and severely damaged the third floor.<sup>57</sup> At the time of the fire, Dr. William C. Nicholas and his wife, Sarah Allen Nicholas, granddaughter of Dr. Edmund Allen, were living in the main part of the house. Local builder Harry G. Borden was given the contract to repair the damaged landmark and took great pains to search for hand-hewn beams to replace those burned in the fire.<sup>58</sup> According to newspaper accounts, A. Holmes Borden rebuilt his store, this time "opposite his old stand." In September 1916, A. Holmes Borden entertained President and Mrs. Woodrow Wilson and Senator James E. Martine, who stopped momentarily at the local landmark. Mrs. Wilson stocked up on fruits and vegetables.<sup>59</sup>

The house remained in the Allen family for 113 years, passing from Dr. Edmund Allen to his unmarried daughters, Sarah (1825-1891) and Harriet (1828-1910). Upon her death, Harriet bequeathed the family property to her nieces Jeanette (Nettie) (1855-1911), Sarah Allen Nicholas (1863-1918), and Maggie (1860-1959). Maggie, who also never married, was the last surviving Allen to live in the family home. She decided to sell the property after ill-health and advancing age made upkeep of the house too difficult.

In 1927, Shrewsbury resident George Silver bought the well-known local landmark for \$20,000.<sup>60</sup> Mr. Silver stated that the purchase had been motivated by a desire to protect the historic property, and to "... prevent any business enterprise from buying the land and destroying the house."<sup>61</sup> Between 1933 and 1941, Silver rented the structure to numerous renters for a variety of businesses. In 1933, the ground floor of the house served as the "Colonial Tea Room," from 1934 to 1936 as the "Blue Door Tea Room," and from 1939 to 1941 an antiques shop occupied the space.<sup>62</sup>

In 1937, the Historical American Buildings Survey recorded both the exterior and interior of the Allen House, producing elevation drawings, floor plans, and woodwork and construction details. At that time, little was known about the early history of the Allen House.

*To separate legend and tradition from history in connection with this dwelling is impossible. It is believed that the foundations were laid in 1667; who built it and who lived in it prior to the time it was purchased by the Allen family in 1812 [sic], is not known.<sup>63</sup>*

This project, one of many begun under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration during the Great Depression, sent architects and draftsmen to various regions of the country to record seventeenth-and eighteenth-century structures with the express purpose of initiating a permanent visual record of early American architecture. Unemployed architects and draftsmen from the American Institute of Architects recorded 668 public and private structures in New Jersey alone.<sup>64</sup> All four of the Monmouth County Historical Association's Colonial-era properties were recorded by the H.A.B. Survey teams between 1936 and 1938.

In March of 1937, a proposal was put forth by several Shrewsbury residents who recommended that the Allen House be purchased from owner and then-mayor of Shrewsbury George Silver for use as a borough hall. Evidently, a similar proposal had been made seven years prior during the days of the Depression, but had quickly been dropped.<sup>65</sup> Mayor Silver resigned in May of that year to remove a possible conflict of interest over the plans. An article in the Red Bank Register also provided a brief description of the Allen House: "... *The new home for the council, if purchased, will be able to hold an audience of more than 80 persons. It has two large parlors with a sliding-door partition, dining room, kitchen, sunroom, and a lavatory on the first floor while on the second floor are four bedrooms, a bathroom, and a lavatory...*"<sup>66</sup> In November the proposal went to public referendum and was defeated by Shrewsbury residents by a two-to-one vote.<sup>67</sup>

The former tavern suffered yet another serious fire in the early spring of 1942. Thought to be caused by either a smoldering chimney fire or faulty electrical wiring, flames blazed up in the early afternoon of 10 February. High winds spread the fire from its origin at the west end of the house across the entire third story. At the time of the second fire, the Allen House was being rented by Ethel M. Edwards. Her son, Shrewsbury Township deputy building inspector and architect Robert C. Edwards, lost many of his drawings which were stored in the attic. The newspaper article which reported the fire also contained a garbled account of the Allen House massacre. The attic was rebuilt yet again.<sup>68</sup>

In 1943, Mrs. Henry H. Holmes purchased the Allen House property. First accounts of the sale in local papers incorrectly reported the purchaser as Miss Mary McDonald of Bayonne. In fact, Miss McDonald had purchased the house as an agent for Mrs. Holmes herself.<sup>69</sup> The Allen House's new owner resided in her home only briefly. The property was willed in 1948 to the Monmouth County Historical Association upon Mrs. Holmes' death. A close family friend, Miss Lillie Huelson, was given life rights to the house, where she lived until 1968 when she left to enter a nursing home. On May 1, 1968, the Monmouth County Historical Association assumed ownership of one of Monmouth County's best-known and oldest surviving historic houses.

The Historical Association almost immediately began an arduous restoration of the structure. Very little was known about the house's occupants before Dr. Edmund Allen and his family, save that the house served as a public house during the eighteenth century and very early nineteenth centuries. It was decided to remove all of the nineteenth and twentieth century additions and alterations, bringing the house back more in line with its possible appearance during its tavern years. Contractor Everett Matthews was chosen to perform the extensive restoration work. Matthews had previously worked on the MCHA's Homes-Hendrickson House in Holmdel during the early 1960s. An amateur archaeological dig conducted by MCHA staff and trustees during the summers of 1972 and 1973 uncovered clear evidence of the house's use as an eighteenth-century tavern. Research into local and county records also uncovered and reconnected Josiah Halstead's name with the building. Trustees on the MCHA's Junior Committee formed S.A.R.A.H. (the Shrewsbury Association for the Restoration of the Allen House) to raise funds for the \$75,000 restoration project.<sup>70</sup>

The Allen House and its importance as an historical meeting place for local farmers, residents, and businessmen, its role in the Revolutionary War, and its survival as one of the earliest Colonial public places in Monmouth County make it one of the most interesting and significant historic structures in the County today. Today, the Allen House offers visitors a rare glimpse into the public side of Colonial life during the second half of the eighteenth century.

<sup>1</sup> Advertisement, New-York Gazette, 25 March 1751. William Nelson, New Jersey Archives (Patterson, New Jersey: Call Printing & Publishing Company, 1917) Vol. 3, 62-63.

<sup>2</sup> John E. Stillwell, Historical and Genealogical Miscellany (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1970 reprint of \*\*\*\* original) Vol. 2, 369, 421.

- <sup>3</sup> MCHA Library and Archives, James Steen Papers: Collection 53, Box 3, Folder 11
- <sup>4</sup> Stillwell's suits involved the payment of debts and bonds in various amounts, from £252 owed by Peter Sonmans, one of the East Jersey Representatives, to £10 owed by Richard Salter. In surviving court documents, Stillwell is variously described as "merchant," or, in one instance, "shop keeper." John E. Stillwell, The History of Lieutenant Nicholas Stillwell (New York City: privately printed, 1929) Vol. 2, 18-22.
- <sup>5</sup> Watson & Henry Associates, Historic Structures Report for The Allen House (Bridgeton, NJ: Prepared for the Monmouth County Historical Association, February 2008) Appendix J
- <sup>6</sup> Stillwell, The History of Lieutenant Nicholas Stillwell, Vol. 2, 18-22.
- <sup>7</sup> James Steen, History of Christ Church, Shrewsbury, New Jersey (Shrewsbury: Christ Church, 1972, private printing) 46. See also Monmouth County Deeds G:48. The area of Rumson Neck was originally the land between the Navesink and Shrewsbury Rivers, extending from what is now Sea Bright westward to the source of the creeks that feed the north and south Shrewsbury Rivers. The Rumson Improvement Association, Rumson (Rumson: The Rumson Improvement Association, 1965) 28.
- <sup>8</sup> William Nelson, New Jersey Marriage Records 1665-1800 (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1967) 451.
- <sup>9</sup> Helen C. Phillips, Red Bank on the Navesink (Red Bank: Caesarea Press, 1977) 18.
- <sup>10</sup> In a transcription of the Christ Church Parish records, the October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1738, entry mentions "Margery, Abigail, Josiah, Daniel and Pearson Hoisted [sic], adults, Shrewsbury." MCHA Library and Archives: James Steen Papers (Collection 55, Box 3, Folder 2)
- <sup>11</sup> Steen, 58.
- <sup>12</sup> Nelson, Vol. 29, 254.
- <sup>13</sup> Early American tavern or inn signs were based upon British tradition. These colorful panels or carvings were both eye-catching and practical. A particular graphic identified an establishment clearly and easily in an age when many people were semi-literate. Kym S. Rice, Early American Taverns: For the Entertainment of Friends and Strangers (Chicago: Regenergy Gateway, in association with Fraunces Tavern Museum, 1983) 74.
- <sup>14</sup> Rice, 29.
- <sup>15</sup> Rice, 69.
- <sup>16</sup> Graham Russell Hodges, Slavery and Freedom In The Rural North: African Americans in Monmouth County, New Jersey 1665-1865 (Madison, WI: Madison House Publishers, Inc., in cooperation with the Friends of Monmouth County Park System, 1997) 53.
- <sup>17</sup> Advertisement, The New-York Gazette, 14 February 1774. William Nelson, New Jersey Archives Vol. 25, 254.
- <sup>18</sup> MCHA Library & Archives: Shrewsbury Town Book (microfilm copy)
- <sup>19</sup> Pennsylvania Gazette, 5 April 1770, No. 2154. Nelson, Vol. 8, 133.
- <sup>20</sup> Margie Hofer, "The Noted and Well Accustomed Tavern": Josiah Halstead's Tavern and Community Life in Eighteenth-Century Shrewsbury, research report, MCHA Curatorial files, October 1992, 5.
- <sup>21</sup> Steen, 37.
- <sup>22</sup> MCHA Library and Archives: Cherry Hall Papers (Collection 22, Box 5, Folder 6)
- <sup>23</sup> Letter from Josiah Halstead to Joseph Holmes, dated 24 May 1762, MCHA Library and Archives: Cherry Hall Papers (Collection 22, Box 5, Folder 6). Joseph Holmes was a most influential citizen in Shrewsbury and was one of the incorporators of Christ Church in 1738. Steen, 37.
- <sup>24</sup> It is estimated that until well into the twentieth century, one out of every 150 women died in childbirth or from childbirth-related complications. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based On Her Diary 1785-1812 (New York: Vintage Books, 1991) 70.
- <sup>25</sup> Gravestone transcription: Christ Church graveyard, Shrewsbury, Monmouth County, New Jersey. B. Rogoff, 1 June 1995.
- <sup>26</sup> Pennsylvania Gazette 26 February 1756, Nelson, Vol. 20, 6-7; New-York Gazette 28 April 1763, Nelson, Vol. 14, 166.
- <sup>27</sup> New-York or General Advertiser, No. 1317, 31 March 1768. Nelson, Vol. 26, 122-123.
- <sup>28</sup> MCHA Library and Archives, James Steen Collection (Collection 55, Box 2, Folder I 0)
- <sup>29</sup> Stephanie Grauman Wolf, As Various As Their Land: The Everyday Lives of Eighteenth-Century Americans (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993) 118.
- <sup>30</sup> MCHA Library and Archives: James Steen Collection.
- <sup>31</sup> New-York Historical Society, Stillwell Collection: memorandum book of Josiah Holmes, Justice of the Peace, 1760-1764.
- <sup>32</sup> Shrewsbury Library Company records, 1763-1790. Original privately owned; photocopy courtesy of the Shrewsbury Historical Society, Shrewsbury, New Jersey.
- <sup>33</sup> Nelson, New Jersey Archives, Vol. 29, 484-5.
- <sup>34</sup> Rice, 68.
- <sup>35</sup> MCHA Library and Archives, Shrewsbury Town Book, microfilm copy, original in New-York Historical Society. James Steen Papers (Collection 55, Box 2, Folder I 0).
- <sup>36</sup> Nelson, Vol. 26, 122-123.
- <sup>37</sup> MCHA Library and Archives, James Steen Papers (Collection 55, Box 2, Folder I 0) Photocopy of the Shrewsbury Town Book. Original in the collection of the New-York Historical Society.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>39</sup> The New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury No. 1118, March 1773. Nelson, New Jersey Archives Vol. 28, 468.
- <sup>40</sup> Scott A. Sandage, Born Losers: A History of Failure In America (Cambridge, Mass., 2005) 194-5.



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- <sup>41</sup> The New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury, No. 1164, 14 February 1774. Nelson, Vol. 10, 254. MCHA files also contain an unidentified transcription of a deed from Stephen Tallman to Judah Allen in the amount of £394 for "All that Lott ... formerly belonging to Josiah Halstead in which the said Halstead dwelt for many years and kept a Tavern ... "
- <sup>42</sup> Stillwell, Vol. 5.
- <sup>43</sup> Shrewsbury Historical Society, photocopy of the original Shrewsbury Library Company records, privately owned.
- <sup>44</sup> Watson & Henry, Historic Structures Report for the Allen House, Shrewsbury, New Jersey, February 2008, Appendix I, p. 30.
- <sup>45</sup> Michael Adelberg, The Allen House Massacre: Establishing the Credibility of a Letter to Determine Historical Fact (Freehold: MCHA Library and Archives, unpublished monograph, 1994) 6.
- <sup>46</sup> Muster Rolls of the New Jersey Volunteers, Special Collections of Alexander Library, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey.
- <sup>47</sup> Edwin Salter, A History of Monmouth and Ocean Counties (Bayonne, New Jersey: E. Gardner & Son, 1890)
- <sup>48</sup> MCHA Library and Archives: Steen Genealogy Collection.
- <sup>49</sup> Letter from Lyttleton White to Daniel Veach McClean, New Jersey Historical Society, dated 25 March 1846. MCHA Library and Archives Collection.
- <sup>50</sup> MCHA Library and Archives collection; transcription of the letter appeared in MCHA newsletter, Vol. I, No. 2, January 1973.
- <sup>51</sup> There is an undated transcription in the MCHA curatorial files of a deed in which Judah Allen purchased the property from Stephen Tallman for £394. Many thanks to Megan Springate, former assistant curator, whose Allen House archaeological research confirmed the fact that the property's original owner between 1774 and 1775, Judah Allen, was a descendant of the property's original owner Judah Allen. In addition, Dr. Edmund Allen, who purchased the property in 1814, was also a descendant of both Judahs, making the site's current name as "the Allen House" triply appropriate.
- <sup>52</sup> Transcription of indenture between Judah Allen and Robert Bowne, circa 1778, MCHA curatorial files.
- <sup>53</sup> Monmouth County Archives: Monmouth County Tavern Licenses.
- <sup>54</sup> Rice, 31.
- <sup>55</sup> Stillwell, Vol. 5, 380-5.
- <sup>56</sup> Stillwell, Vol. 5, 385. The MCHA also has in its Library and Archives Collection the original deed from the Whites to Allen and Corlies. ( 1982.28)
- <sup>57</sup> "Old Landmark Damage," Red Bank Register, Wednesday, 22 April, 1914.
- <sup>58</sup> "Repairing Old House," Red Bank Register, 5 August, 1914.
- <sup>59</sup> "President At Shrewsbury," Red Bank Register, 20 September 1916.
- <sup>60</sup> "Landmark In New Hands," Red Bank Register, 29 September 1927.
- <sup>61</sup> "Old Landmark Is Sold In Shrewsbury," undated and unidentified newspaper clipping, MCHA Curatorial files
- <sup>62</sup> Homer K. Secor ran the Colonial Tea Room in the Allen House from 1933 to 1934. Randall Gabrielan, Images of America: Shrewsbury (Dover, N.J.: Arcadia Publishing, 1996) 30.
- <sup>63</sup> The Library of Congress: Historic American Buildings Survey records. HABS NJ-228 Data Pages 3.
- <sup>64</sup> Martyvonne Dehoney, A Resource Guide To Art and Architecture in New Jersey From Pre-Columbian Times to the Civil War (New York: Columbia University, unpublished doctoral thesis, 1969) 8-10.
- <sup>65</sup> "Voters to Decide on Borough Hall for Shrewsbury," Red Bank Register, 28 October 1937.
- <sup>66</sup> "Shrewsbury Is Considering A New Boro Hall," Red Bank Register, 20 May 1937
- <sup>67</sup> "Robinson Beats Wood in Fight At Shrewsbury: Proposition to Buy Former Allen Homestead as Borough Hall Defeated by 2 to 1 Vote," Red Bank Register, 4 November 1937
- <sup>68</sup> "Shrewsbury Landmark Burns In High Wind," unidentified newspaper, February 1942. MCHA Curatorial files.
- <sup>69</sup> "Historic Property in Shrewsbury Changes Hands," unidentified newspaper, circa 1943, MCHA Curatorial files.
- <sup>70</sup> James. S. Brown, "Colonial Tavern Is Being Restored," Asbury Park Press 12 September 1971.