



Monmouth  
County  
Historical  
Association

70 Court Street • Freehold NJ 07728 • (732) 462-1466 • [www.monmouthhistory.org](http://www.monmouthhistory.org)

## MARLPIT HALL

### BACKGROUND AND NOTES

Marlpit Hall provides a focus for the social history of Middletown from the late 17th century to 1820. The earliest section of Marlpit Hall was built as a one-and-a-half story house in 1686 by James Grover, Jr. John Taylor made substantial additions and alterations between 1740 and 1752. Members of the Grover and the Taylor families were among the area's leading politicians, farmers, and merchants. The structure therefore, reflects the various lifestyles and tastes of its occupants, as well as the early history of the growth of Middletown as an important colonial village in Monmouth County. Architectural features demonstrate the growth of the structure, while period settings illustrate the use of the house by its occupants.

### HISTORY OF THE HOUSE AND FAMILIES

The lands along the Navesink River have occupied a significant place in New Jersey history. The Dutch surrender of New Netherland to England in 1665 initiated a series of events which resulted in the settlement of what is now Monmouth County. Inhabitants of New England and Long Island, who anticipated the arrival of English Governor Richard Nicolls, started negotiations for land purchases from the Indians. Indian chiefs Popomora and Mischacoing deeded lands at Navesink to James Hubbard, John Bowne, John Tilton, Jr., Richard Stout, William Goulding, and Samuel Spicer. In April 1665, another group of Indians led by Taplawappanmund deeded additional property to Tilton, Spicer, Goulding, Stout, James Grover, and Richard Gibbons. On April 8, 1665, Governor Nicolls issued the Monmouth Patent by which one hundred families obtained the right to settle the area. Patentees included the men named above (except Hubbard) as well as Nathaniel Sylvester, William Reape, Walter Clark, Nicholas Davis, and Obadiah Holmes.

Attracted by the rich farmland and the promise of freedom from religious persecution, the earliest settlers arrived in 1667. Later in the year, thirty-six village house lots, meadow lands at Shoal Harbor along Raritan Bay, and pasture lands were set aside for a lot drawing. James Grover, Sr., the town surveyor, selected village lots #36 and #16.

Grover may have built his house on one of these village lots, although available evidence cannot positively establish his place of residence in Middletown Village. He did not, however, acquire adjacent land as was the common practice. Instead, he concentrated his holdings near his meadow east of Shoal Harbor and in lands along the Navesink. His first residence was probably an inn which he maintained near the Navesink River until the summer of 1668. Lot #36 probably remained vacant for some twenty years until his son James built a structure there. The history of lot #16 is unknown.

Although it is impossible to firmly establish the residence of James Grover, Sr., it is evident that he was in a position of influence as one of the most important of the many men who served the people of Middletown in the 17th century. Grover was a skilled carpenter, farmer, iron furnace and grist mill owner and operator, first clerk of Middletown (1667-1669), and surveyor of town lands. He also served as deputy to the first New Jersey General Assembly in 1668, as judge of the Middletown court in 1670, and after 1675 as judge of the county courts. While John Bowne served as court president, Grover was his assistant. Both men were appointed justices of the peace for Middletown during the governorships of Carteret and Rudyard. From 1675 to 1683 they served as officers of the militia company of Middletown -- Bowne as captain, Grover as lieutenant. In 1683, they were appointed commissioners of a court of small causes.

Grover and his wife Alice started a family while still living in Gravesend, Long Island. The family consisted of two daughters and three sons, James, Joseph, and Safety. In the 1670s the sons reached maturity, married, and left their parents' household.

The Grover sons participated in politics in Middletown, but none reached the prominence of their father. James Jr., the first-born son, was elected fence viewer in 1677. He settled disputes which arose over breaks in fences surrounding pasture lands maintained by area residents. If a fence was damaged, Grover determined if the fault lay with the owner of an unruly animal or with a resident who had neglected to properly maintain his portion of the fence. Of the other sons, Joseph

served as constable in 1683 and Safety rose to the rank of captain in the militia. James Jr. and Safety were elected Freeholders in 1714.

About 1685, James Grover, Jr. became the first occupant of lot #36 in Middletown Village. A surviving account with the estate of James Grover, Sr. dated June 17, 1686 indicates that £8.17 was paid to Grover, Jr. "for framing the house," and an additional "sixteen days other work about the house and giting (sic) timber for the mill." Grover, Jr. may well have been building the house for his father, who died in 1685. He later acquired the lot from the executors of Grover, Sr.'s estate.

Traces of the one-and-one-half story house which James Grover, Jr. constructed in 1686 can be found in the early section of what is now called Marlpit Hall. The house was built in the Dutch manner, the popular construction method in early Monmouth County building. A single room provided living space for the Grover family; the loft area above was used for storage. James Grover, Jr. lived there until death in 1715.

The subsequent history of the farm and original structure is clouded. Available evidence indicates the farm was sold in 1719 to John Wall, a Middletown merchant who died in 1726 and who was distantly related to the Gravers. Recent structural investigation has shown that significant alterations were made to the building about 1720. The north end was rebuilt to accommodate an English-style fireplace, and other repairs were made to the frame. In addition, casement windows were replaced by sliding sash, and to mask these structural modifications, bright red paint was applied.

Tradition suggests that John Taylor, an important Monmouth County politician and merchant, owned the property from the late 1730s until 1752. In 1752, John sold the farm to Barnardus Rider of Long Island, who apparently leased the farm to others. No evidence can be found to suggest that he ever occupied it. Rider sold the farm in 1771 to Edward Taylor, John's brother, beginning the long history of Taylor family ownership.

John and Edward Taylor, occupants of Marlpit Hall in the mid-18th century, were two of the most prominent political figures in Monmouth County. The brothers inherited vast wealth from their merchant father George, as well as a sound reputation from which to launch their political careers.

"Squire" John Taylor (1715-1798) was the first member of the family to occupy the house. A merchant himself, Squire John married Phebe Heard, daughter of a respected Woodbridge merchant. Through political office in Monmouth County, Taylor gained even greater wealth and influence. He was justice of the peace in Monmouth County from 1744 until 1751 when he was appointed county sheriff, one of the most lucrative public offices. During the 1750s and early 60s, Taylor is believed to have spent a great deal of time in New York, since legal and practical requirements of being a sheriff did not necessitate his presence in the county.

He also served Monmouth County as judge of county superior court in 1756 and again in the years 1767-1773. He was reappointed sheriff in 1763; served as county surrogate in 1767 and 1768; and as justice of the peace again in 1768.

During its occupancy by John Taylor, 1730 to 1752, the Grover structure was significantly altered and expanded. A large section with Georgian-style floor plan and architectural features was added, making the house among the first local buildings to use this new style. Certainly John Taylor was influenced by the styles and customs of New York. As a wealthy man, he could afford a house which reflected sophisticated tastes.

Although he went to great expense to improve Marlpit Hall, Taylor apparently needed a grander showplace. From the sale of the property to Barnardus Rider in 1752, John Taylor reserved a lot on which he built a larger, more stylish house popularly called "Taylor's Folly." This two-story Georgian House, which burned in the 1890s, was near Marlpit Hall.

English taste was combined with local Dutch building practices in the addition to Marlpit Hall. A two-section door and hooded porch reflect Dutch building traditions, while Georgian pilasters and the paneling pattern of the same doorway point to English builders' guides of the period. The symmetrical plan of the interior includes a wide central hall containing the stairway. A parlor and bedroom are located to the left of the hallway and a large dining room to the right. The interior details stand in contradiction to the common assumption that early houses were plain and drab. Parlor woodwork includes a cornice with dentil molding and well-proportioned stop-fluted pilasters at either side of the corner fireplace. Fireplaces in the bedrooms to the rear and directly above share similar architectural details with the parlor. A fine corner cupboard in the parlor is decorated with raised panel doors and shell carving inside.

Edward Taylor became the owner of Marlpit Hall in 1771 and lived there until his death in 1783. While Edward Taylor's (1712-1783) political career was not as extensive as his brother's, he was a popular and respected assemblyman, miller, and large landholder. He was elected to three consecutive terms with the General Assembly. On Mahoras Brook, he built and operated a grist mill, and by 1778 owned 1200 acres, the largest landholdings in Middletown.

In the pre-war years, Edward maintained a position of prominence in Middletown and Monmouth County. He was a leader of a pre-war movement, serving as Chairman of the Monmouth County committee of Correspondence in July 1774. The committee supported formation of the Continental Congress and a non-importation agreement. Edward was elected to the New Jersey Provincial Congress in May 1775, and served until June 1776. When independence became a goal,

Edward Taylor, fearing the loss of his estate and wealth, took a loyalist stance. Many persons were angered when he refused to accept Continental money in payment of debts, and affidavits were collected against him.

Edward's brother, John Taylor, was also a loyalist. Each of the public offices which he held as patronage appointments of the royal governor made him responsible for law enforcement and upholding the authority of the Crown. As His Majesty's Lord High Commissioner of New Jersey, John posted notices throughout Monmouth County ordering every man eligible for militia service to assemble and take an oath of allegiance to the Crown. As a result of this he was taken before the Council of Safety where he prudently took an oath of allegiance to the State of New Jersey, an action which kept his estate from being confiscated. Following this incident, he resided quietly in Middletown throughout the remainder of the war.

When war broke out, George Taylor, one of Edward's sons, was elected captain of the first Regiment Monmouth County Militia, and later assumed the rank of colonel of his regiment. With the collapse of Continental Army in 1776, he deserted to the enemy, commanded a loyalist unit and raided his former neighbors. Aided by his father, George and the raiders were able to elude capture one evening. Edward was arrested for his role in the incident and confined to his farm which caused him considerable financial hardship. The Taylor family remained quiet for the rest of the Revolution.

During the War, the Taylors lost much of their wealth and all of their political influence. Neither John nor Edward held office again. John Taylor left Middletown for Perth Amboy in 1791, where he died seven years later in 1798.

After Edward Taylor's death, Marlpit Hall became the property of his third son John (1740-1818) who married Mary Holmes of Middletown and remained a farmer. He was the last member of the family to farm the land himself and raise a family on it. Renovations to the dining room undertaken about 1800 significantly altered its architectural appearance. Flush-paneled doors replaced those with raised panels of an earlier style, and the fireplace wall was modified to accommodate several closets and cupboards.

Successful at farming, John Taylor left a moveable estate valued at over \$4000 when he died. In his will, he divided his estate equally among his six children, who had grown up on the farm in the 1780s and 90s. Joseph, Edward, and Sarah moved from the farm as adults. Samuel, Huldah, and Mary continued to live there for the rest of their lives. The heirs were able to keep the property intact through a series of complicated transactions.

Mary Holmes Taylor, the only child of John Taylor's son Edward, purchased the farm in 1859 and subsequently moved to Middletown. Edward was a dry goods merchant in New York City, and alderman of the Second Ward in the 1830s. With the purchase of the farm, Mary Holmes Taylor probably received much of her grandfather's household furnishings. The will had stated that John Taylor's personal possessions be divided among his children, not sold. After she bought the homestead, she and her husband, Joseph Dorsett Taylor built Orchard Home, which stands next to the old house. The homestead was then leased to tenant farmers.

Mary Holmes Taylor died in 1897. She left the farm to her two children, Edward and Mary Holmes Taylor III. Edward and his wife Mary E. Dominick Taylor remained childless and died in 1909 and 1918 respectively, leaving Mary Holmes Taylor III in full possession of the property. In 1919, a proposed road realignment would have destroyed the house. Mary Holmes Taylor III was able to convince state officials to move the house 50 feet and place it on a new foundation, which saved the house from demolition. After Miss Taylor's death in 1930, the house was purchased and restored for the Monmouth County Historical Association through the generosity of Mrs. J. Armory Haskell.

## **FURNISHINGS AT MARLPIT HALL**

The furnishings plan for Marlpit Hall reflects the use of the house from 1700-1820 and includes a number of objects with histories of ownership in Middletown and Monmouth County. Pertinent bills, invoices, and estate inventories suggested furnishings and interior arrangements. For example, an inventory of James Grover's estate, taken in 1715, as well as the accounts of Middletown merchants, Thomas Holmes (d. 1750) and his son Josiah, were used in the selection of objects for the original one-room section.

Built in 1685, the one-room section is furnished as the main living space of a small house in Middletown between 1700 and 1730 showing the local mix of Dutch and English tastes. During this period, families did not have the level of privacy that we enjoy today. There were no specialized spaces for the activities of life. Beds and tables were set up and taken down according to the needs and appetites of the occupants. The gate-leg table in the center of the room, for example, can be folded against the wall. This important walnut table was made in the New York City vicinity circa 1710-30 and descended in the Taylor family. As a valuable item, a carpet was placed on a table, not under it. When the table was used for dining, the carpet would be protected by a plain linen cloth.

Beds or pallets made of coarse linen stuffed with straw were rolled and stored during the day. Chests held bedding, clothing, and personal possessions. Grover's inventory listed three beds (but no bedsteads), ten blankets, three coverlets,

two sheets, and three chests. The large, early 18th century chest here is of New Jersey yellow pine. Its red paint would have been much brighter when new.

The extraordinary painted kas and banging cupboard are examples of Dutch taste in household furnishings. Both came from the Luyster family of Middletown. The kas, made in New York City vicinity circa 1720, retains much of its original blue-grey painted decoration of fruits. It was the principle storage place for textiles. Herbs, spices, or other small cooking items may have been stored in the hanging cupboard.

Ceramics representative of those in use in the 17th and early 18th century include two German tin-glazed earthenware chargers, also from the Luysters, and a 1643 tin-glazed earthenware tankard with pewter mounts. The Rhenish salt-glazed stoneware jug held a variety of liquids used in cooking or for immediate consumption. Additional tableware included hom cups and pewter spoons. Cooking utensils were usually fashioned from iron, copper, and brass.

Parlor furnishings in the large section of the house reflect the important social status and style consciousness of the Taylor family in the mid-18th century. A parlor was used for a variety of functions. As in earlier periods, chairs and tables could be arranged for many types of activities. Drop-leaf and tilt-top tables were easily moved to accommodate the tea ceremony or dining. A New York mahogany game table of 1750-70 is set with cards and drinking and smoking paraphernalia to show the popular forms of entertainment of the period. Green baize, used to protect the table, was stocked by the merchant John Taylor. A grouping of chairs from New England, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania represent several variations of the Queen Anne style as made in America between 1730 and 1760. Pastel portraits of King George III and Queen Charlotte are appropriate accessories for a Loyalist household. The walnut desk of 1730-50 descended in the Taylor family.

The most important bedroom in an 18th century house was usually located on the first floor. At Marlpit Hall, the main bedroom is to the rear of the parlor, and could be used for entertaining small groups of close friends. Other bedrooms in the house were not so finely decorated or furnished. The bedstead has been dressed with blue and white linen check, one of the most common items stocked by John Taylor. 18th century furniture with Taylor family histories include the high chest and dressing table, both made in Middletown about 1750-70, and a green painted Windsor arm chair. An upholstered easy chair is next to a stand set for tea with Chinese export porcelain. According to estate inventories, easy chairs were usually found in bedrooms. The use of porcelain was suggested by an invoice of goods belonging to John Taylor in 1761. Tea could be taken in the fashionably decorated bedroom, as well as the parlor.

Windsor chairs have been used to furnish the center hallway. Center halls were often thought of as rooms or storage areas before 1820. Portraits in the hall are of Eleanor Taylor Lyell and her husband, Captain Fenwick Lyell. Eleanor, the daughter of Edward Taylor, was living at Marlpit Hall with her children at the time of her father's death in 1783.

During the early federal period, rooms took on many of the specific functions with which we identify them today. The dining room at Marlpit Hall reflects the occupancy of John Taylor (1740-1818) during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Wallpaper reproduced from that found in the Imlay House in Allentown, New Jersey, decorates the walls. The original paper was made in Philadelphia by the manufacturer William Poyntell and sold to John Imlay in 1794.

Although most of the federal furniture in the room was made in New York, nearly all of it was owned in Middletown or Monmouth County. Three shield-back chairs belonged to Comm. William Bainbridge, a grandson of John Taylor, Esq. The other similar shield design chairs in the room were owned locally by John and Mary Lloyd Hendrickson. The Taylor family clock, made in Monmouth County by Elias Sayre, was listed in the 1818 inventory of this room. Appraised at \$60.00, it was the most valuable item in the entire house. A gilded Girandole from the Hartshorne family hangs over a sideboard which holds glasses, bottles, and ceramics in readiness for a meal. The silver-plated monteigh, used for chilling and rinsing wine glasses, was owned by Major-General James Green of Long Branch.

The table setting is based in part on directions published by Robert Roberts in the House Servants Directory (second edition, 1828). Creamware or queensware, a highly refined earthenware manufactured in England, was extremely popular in America beginning about 1760. It is not surprising therefore, that John Taylor's estate contained "1 lot of Queens ware, green edged dishes and plates." The queensware on the table is part of a much larger service discovered in an attic in Upper Freehold Township, Monmouth County. Other ceramics in use in the room include Chinese export porcelain as well as exquisite white stonewares of the type made circa 1790-1820 at the Castleford Pottery in England.