

The History of Monroe Township

By: Ashley Swei

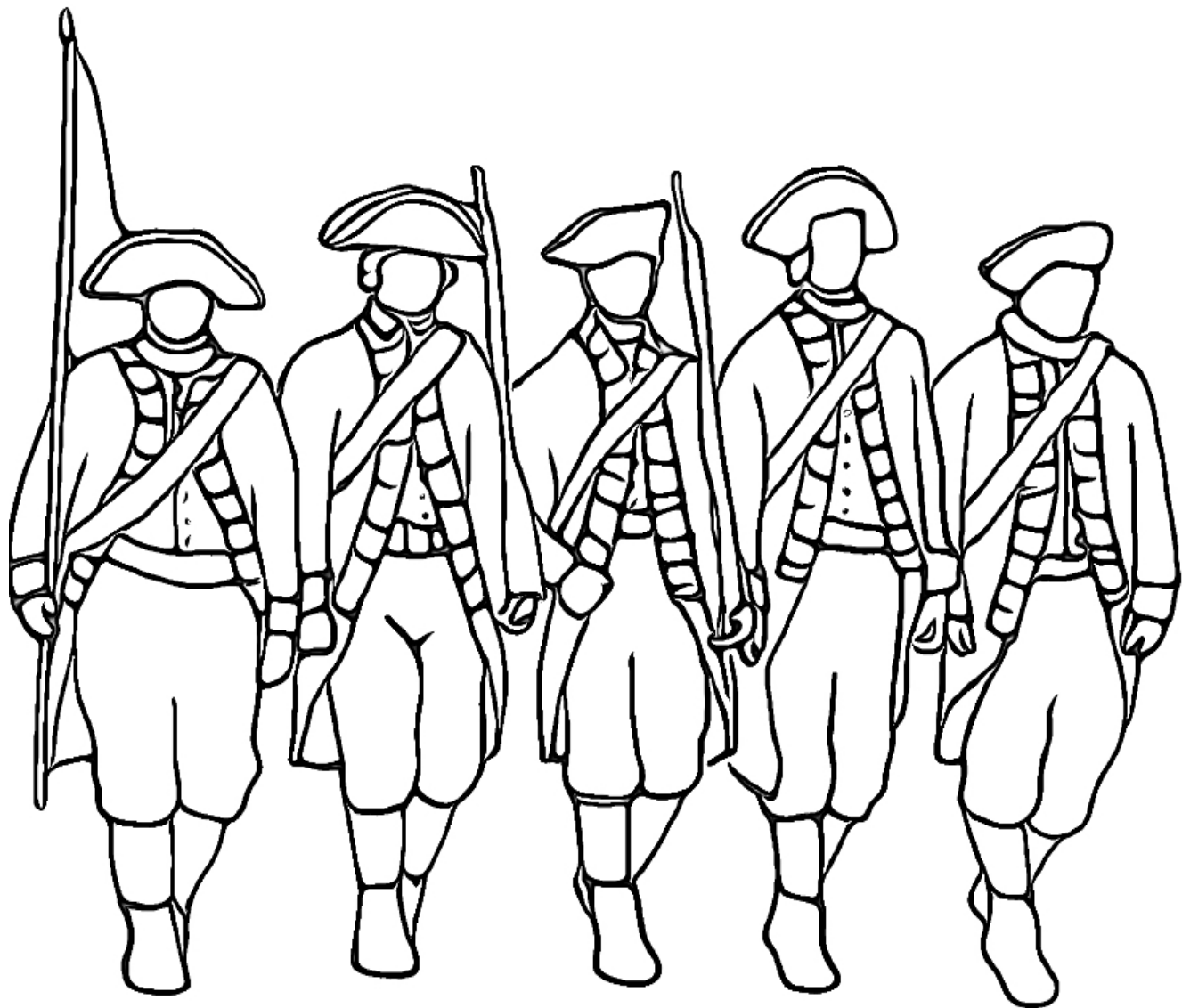




In the area of Monroe Township, there was a specific group of Native Americans known as the Lenni-Lenape living there before any European settlers came. Lenni-Lenape means “Original People”. They built homes in the woods of the New Jersey. They used anything that nature had to offer such as the bark and branches from the trees to make houses and tools. They used every part of an animal such as a deer to make clothes and to use as food. They made houses called Wigwams. They were built as temporary homes so that they could move around easily when the seasons changed.



During the Revolutionary War, many important battles were fought in the state of New Jersey. One of them was called the Battle of Monmouth. On the night of June 27th, 1778, George Washington and his army, better known as the Continental Army, set up camp in Monroe Township near present day Gravel Hill/Union Valley Road, the night before the battle. He also marched through the Monroe Township area on his way to fight the British army.



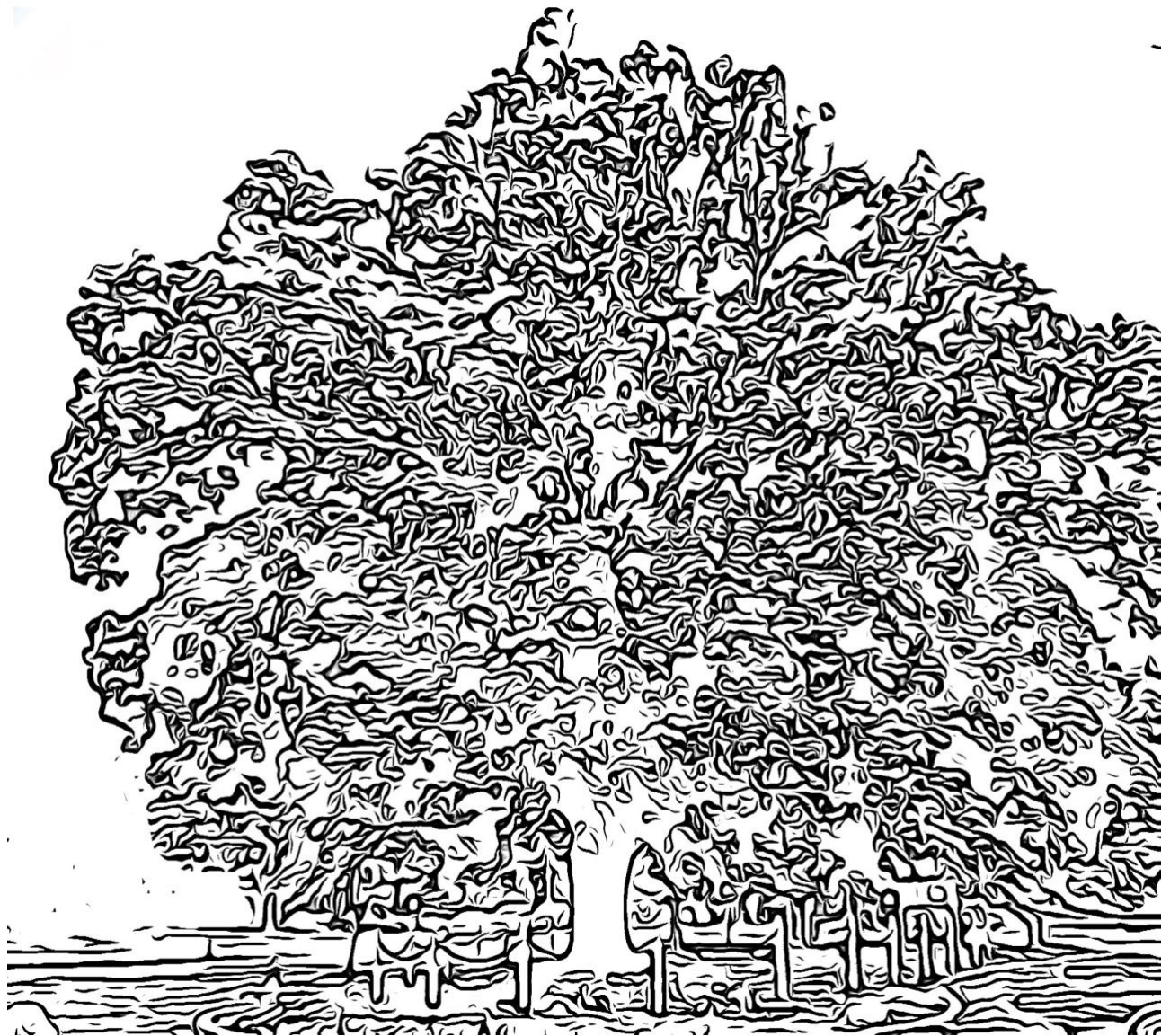
At the Battle of Monmouth, the British army retreated, but neither side won. Monmouth was the longest one day battle fought between the Continental Army and the British Army in the Revolutionary War.



Monroe Township was named after the fifth president, James Monroe, who was president from 1817-1825. James Monroe was once a captain in George Washington's army.



Monroe Township was founded in February of 1838. It was originally part of a town called South Amboy. In the seal of our town is the outline of the shape of Monroe on a map. In the middle, is a tree known as the Monroe Oak and is the symbol of the town.



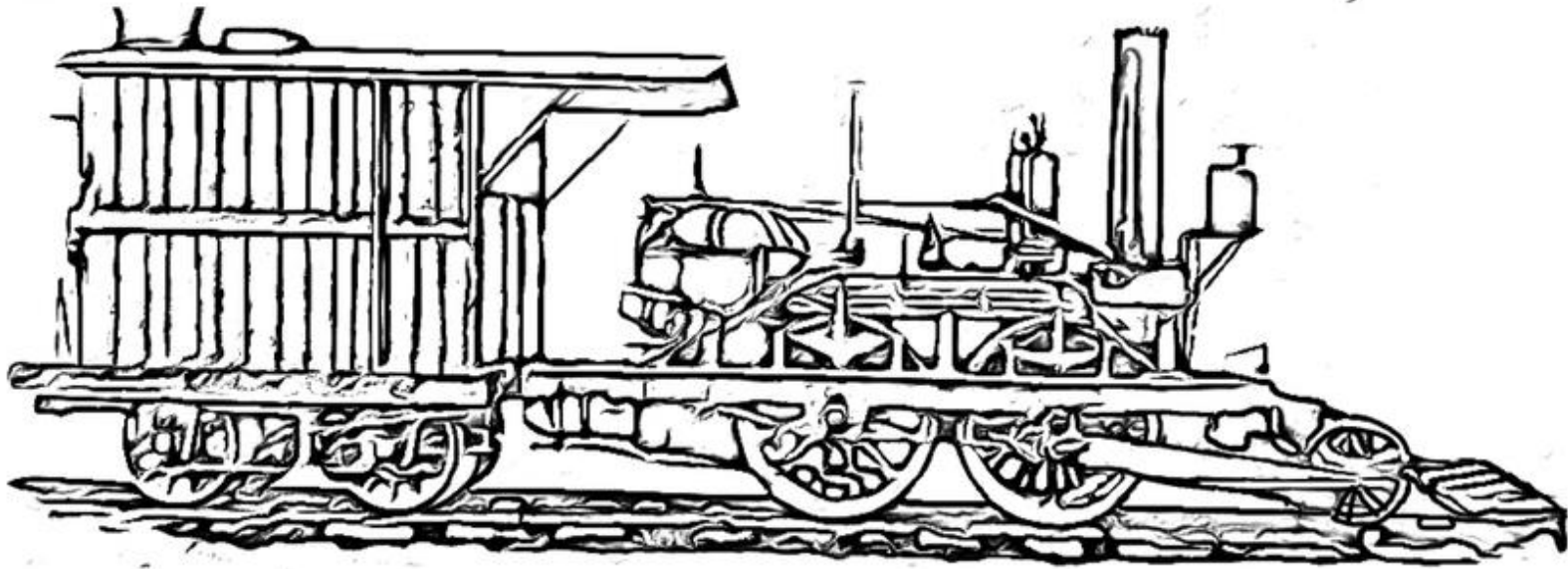
With the help from the Monroe Area Historical Association and R. Maitland Vandenberg, this tree known as the Monroe Oak became the symbol for Monroe Township. The tree dates back to the when the first settlers came to Monroe, making the tree over 300 years old! The Monroe Oak is located on Applegarth Road in front of a bank.



This building held the town's general store as well as the post office starting in 1859. Whoever was the owner of the general store was also in charge of the mail as well. The Applegate family ran the post office for many years. Howard Applegate used to bring mail in his white wagon over the bumpy roads to 140 families. If he couldn't use his wagon, he would carry his mail bag over his shoulder and continue his journey by horseback through any weather, even snow.



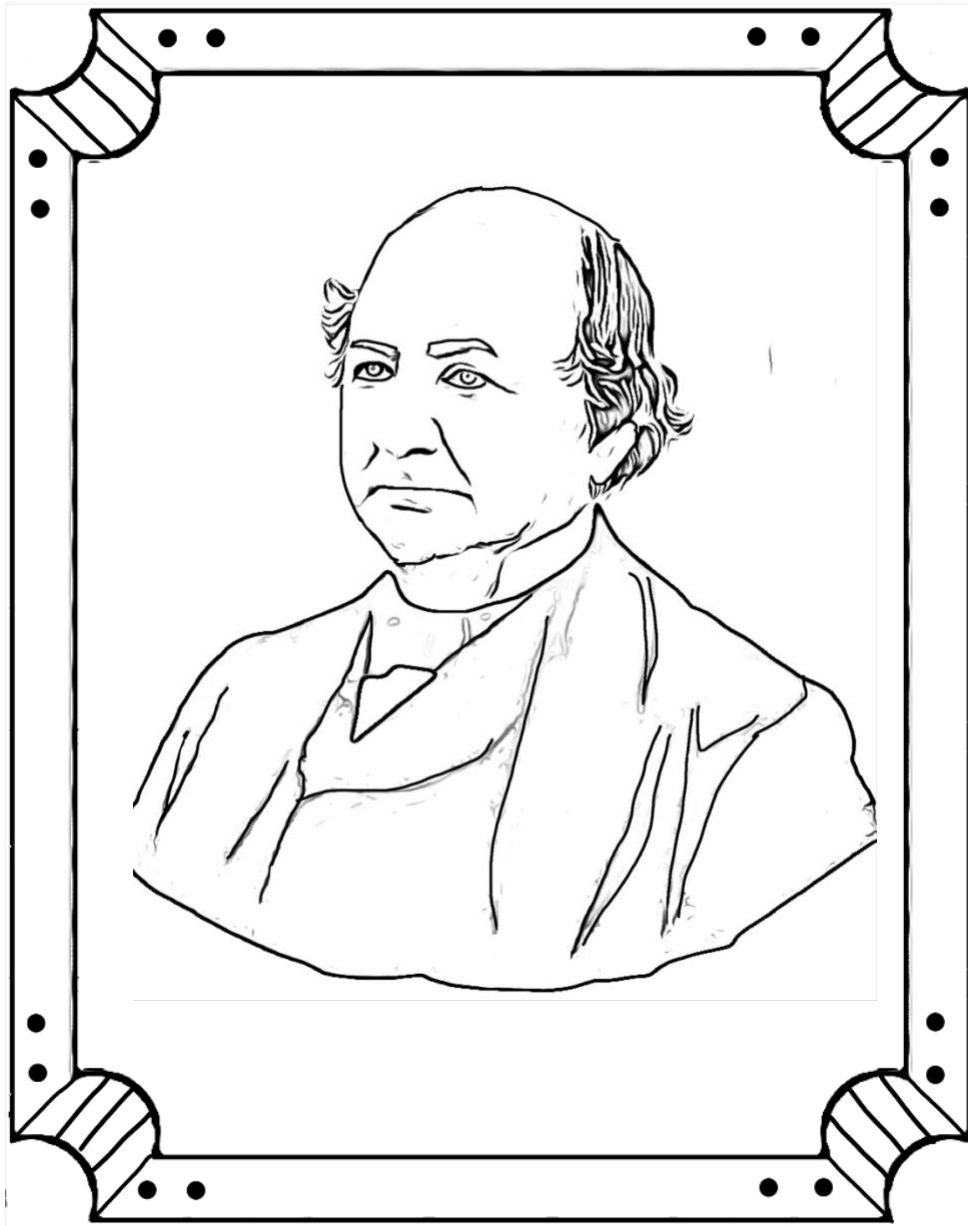
There was 16 one room schoolhouses in Monroe Township which started to be built in the 1830s. The school pictured above was built in the 1850s on Prospect Plains Road. Children wrote on slate boards with chalk instead of paper and pencil. In the early years, there were no individual desks and children sat on benches instead. Children were sorted into three grades: primary (ages 5-8), grammar (ages 8 – 13) and high school (ages 13+).



During 1831, the first railroad in New Jersey was built and it was called the Camden and Amboy railroad. It carried passengers in horse drawn carriages. The first train or locomotive on the railroad was called "John Bull". Since this railroad had a station in Jamesburg, it helped the town to prosper with more people going through it.



This was James M. Vandenberg's hotel which opened in October 1901 at the intersection of Applegarth and Wyckoff Mills Road. He sold a colonial-era tavern that belonged to his father to his neighbor Enos Mount and then soon began to build his new hotel for a cost of \$5,000. It included many modern comforts such as steam heat and running water. A man named James Courtney bought the hotel in 1914, and changed the name to Courtney's Hotel. In the years that followed, the former hotel had changed owners and names many times. A Persis restaurant is located there today.



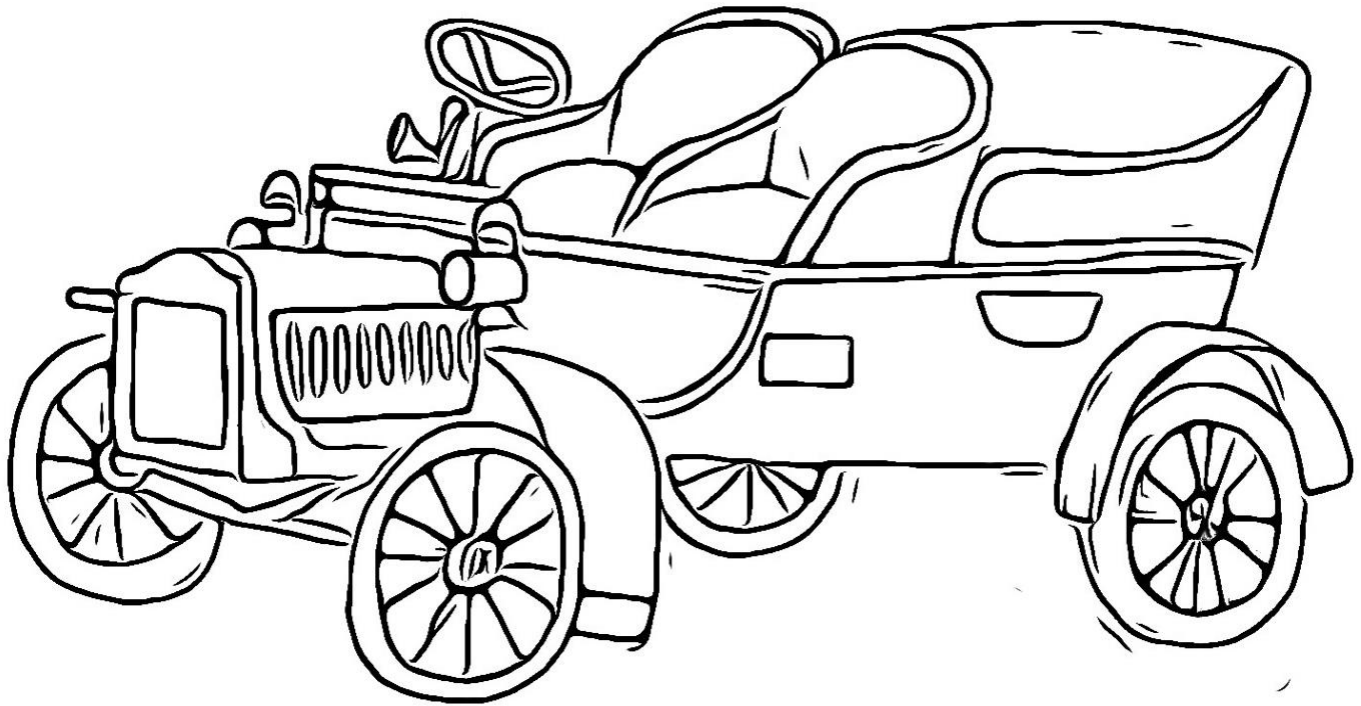
James Buckelew was responsible for many things that happened in Jamesburg and Monroe Township. James was one of eleven children and was a successful farmer, owned a mill on the Manalapan Brook, and helped to make an agricultural railroad from Jamesburg to Freehold. The town of Jamesburg was also named after him.



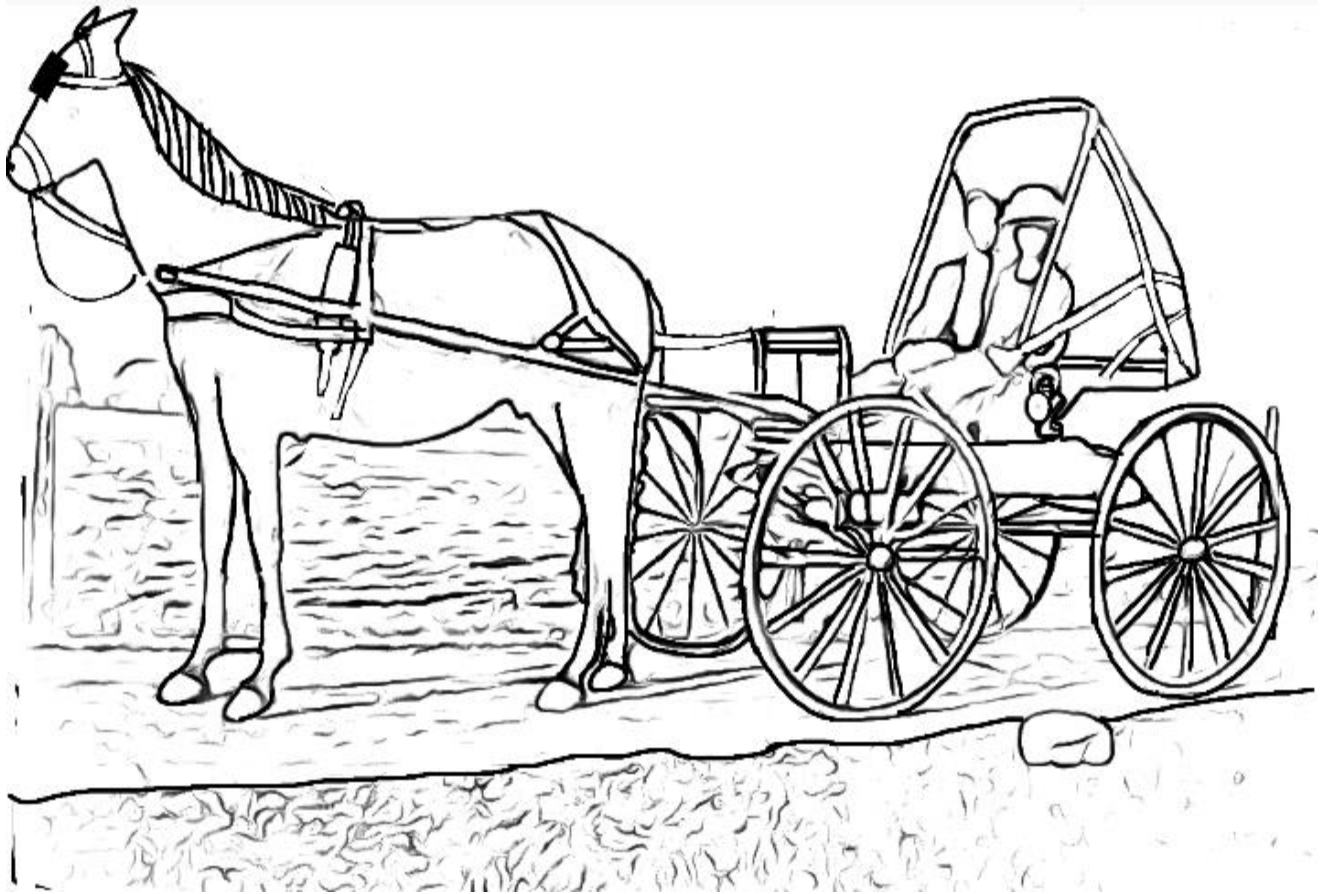
Cranberries were a popular food that was grown in Monroe Township. There were two large cranberry bogs owned by James Buckelew in the Monroe Township area. Hundreds of workers from the Monroe area picked these cranberries and put them in horse-drawn wagons. The crates of cranberries were put onto trains and shipped to many different places to be sold.



William DeBow was one of the most successful farmers in Monroe Township in the early 1900s. His farm was on Prospect Plains Road which he ran from 1888 until he retired in 1916. He also was the director of the First National Bank of Cranbury.



In the early 1900s, automobiles or cars became very popular. One of the cars was the Queen Automobile which were built for only 4 years (1904-1907). This car is pictured above. Since a farmer named William DeBow was very successful, he was able to buy one of these cars and he was one of the first people in Monroe Township to buy one.



The majority of the town did not have cars and could travel by horse and buggy shown above In the late 1800s- early 1900s. A buggy is a two-person carriage that usually was pulled by one or two horses. Many families considered their horses to be their pets and often gave them names. The rocks on the ground below the buggy was painted white and were used to help guide the horses in the night so they would know where the driveway to a house was located.



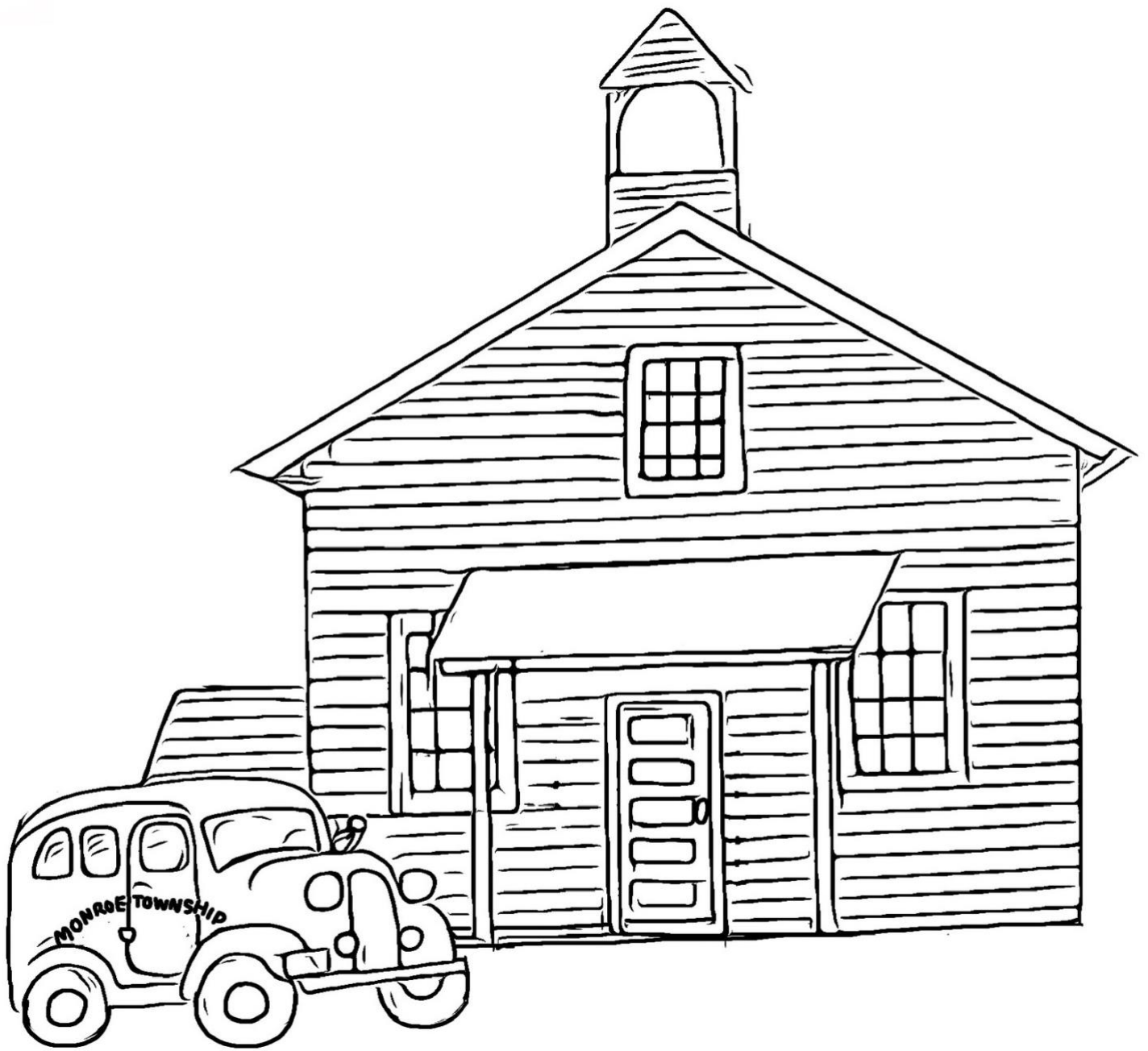
Farmers in Monroe grew many types of food and one of the best selling was potatoes. In the early 1900s, boys and their fathers used tools called potato diggers which helped to scoop potatoes out of the soil and be ready for picking. The potatoes were put in a wagon, taken back to a barn, and placed in sacks and would be sewn shut with a needle.



Monroe Township had its first official town hall in 1929. An old, abandoned one-room school house building on Prospect Plains Road was repaired and used as the town hall in 1937. Before they had a town hall, the people of the town attended public meetings in hotels, homes of town officials, and inns which is where they would talk about how they could improve their town as well as have elections.



John Luciano Intravartolo opened his own grocery store in Jamesburg on March 30, 1923. Over the next year, the store had a butcher shop and a gasoline pump. John and his wife, Magdalena "Lena" Ippolito, ran the store for the next 36 years. People from Monroe Township went to Jamesburg for daily needs like food or clothing while Jamesburg depended on Monroe Township for foods from their farms and other farm products.



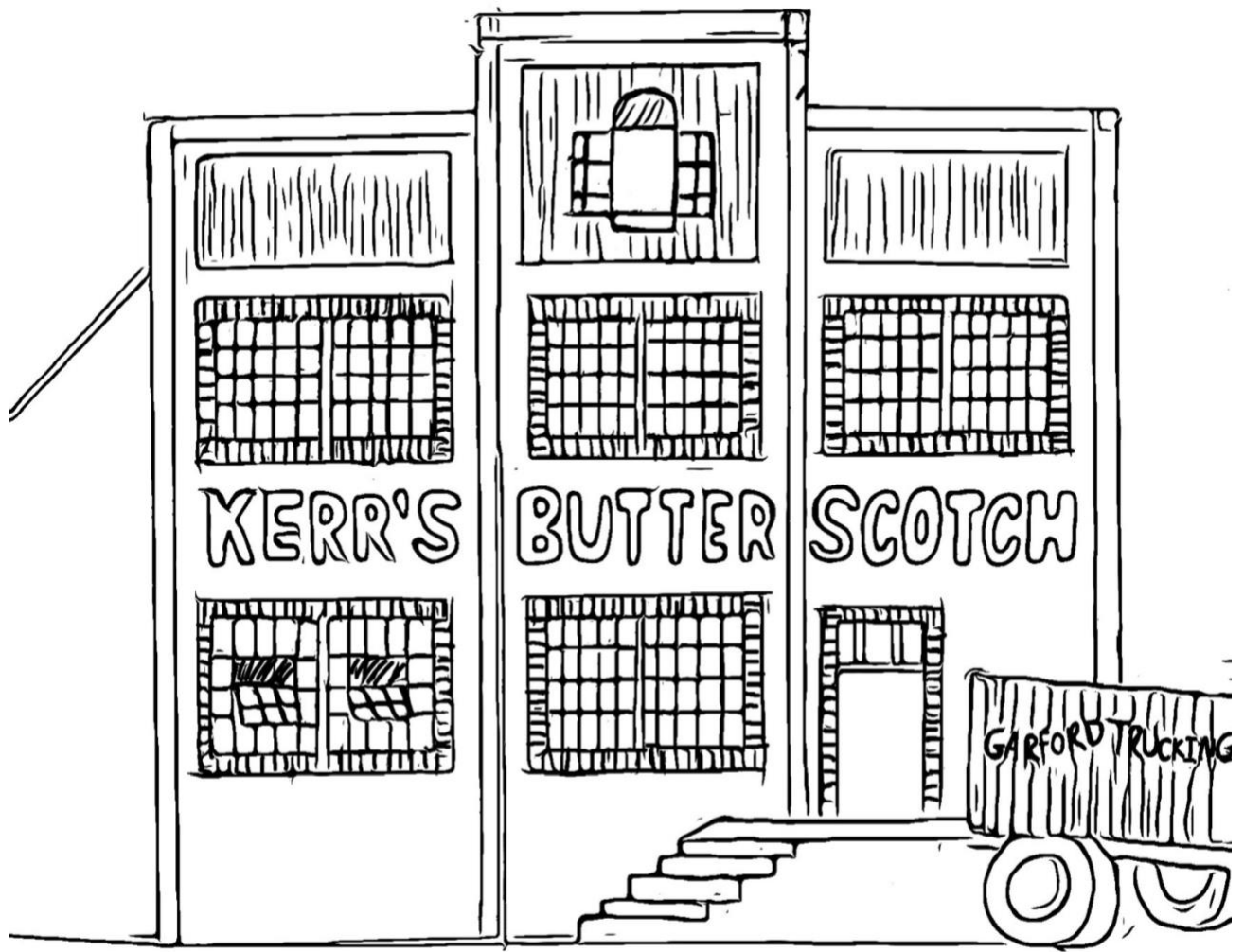
The first police station in Monroe was made in 1936 and the building was once an old one-room school house on Buckelew Avenue. There was a bell on top of the building which is now part of the World War II Memorial in Thompson Park. Phil Magrino was Monroe's first police chief.



Forsgate Farms was created in 1913 when John A. and Alice M. Forster bought a farm in Monroe Township. This farm sold dairy, ice cream and poultry, such as chicken. Hundreds of people from Monroe and Jamesburg worked there. Years later, John A. Forster became interested in golf so he had an 18 hole golf course built as well as a clubhouse in 1931. The Forsgate Clubhouse is pictured above.



The one-room schoolhouses all closed in 1936 as there were more kids than before in Monroe. The two new identical schools were built and they were called "School No. 1" and "School No. 2". These schools originally had eight classrooms, an auditorium, an office, and a teacher's room. The first class of students to graduate only had 17 students in 1937. These schools are still used today and are now known as Applegarth and Barclay Brook Elementary School.



This building used to be the Shapanka Shirt Factory, but it was forced to close because of the lack of money caused by the Great Depression. After World War II, a candy company known as Kerr's Butterscotch bought the building and made it a candy factory. In the 1950's, some of the factories workers would take out boxes of the candy that were already demanded and could not be sold in stores. Kids in Jamesburg would go and take this candy. The town would smell like butterscotch when the candy was being made. This building still stands today at 300 Buckelew Avenue.

KERR'S



BUTTER
SCOTCH
SQUARES

5¢



There used to be an air park in the 1930s-1960s in present-day Thompson park. A few people living in Monroe Township and Jamesburg owned their own small airplanes and it was a hobby of theirs to go flying.

Special Thanks to...

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