



Settled in
1665

RUMSON

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Before the tennis courts or recreation utilization were ever dreamed of, this mansion and working nursery occupied the site of Piping Rock Park. Once the estate of Rumson's first mayor, Frank McMahon, it was converted into a popular restaurant, Peter's Piping Rock, in the mid 1940's. In the 1960's, matching funds from a Green Acres grant enabled the Rumson Borough Council to create Piping Rock Park. The Keith McHeffey Foundation is renovating the athletic field at the park as a memorial to the local residents lost in the 9/11 tragedy.

ALL ABOUT RUMSON

Much is happening in Rumson due to the generosity of a group of people who are attempting to commemorate the passing of their good friend and the many others connected to this community who lost their lives with him on 9/11. Over 600 people attended an event in September when the Keith McHeffey Foundation unveiled architectural plans for a major renovation of Piping Rock Park. Because Keith McHeffey was such an enthusiastic participant in Rumson Recreation sports programs, the Foundation has made its goal the creation of a new playing field for the enhancement of our park and as a memorial to Keith and the many local citizens who were lost to us in the September 11th tragedy. Work has begun on the site, and it may be of interest to know something about the long history of that section of Rumson known as Piping Rock Park. The current playing field facing Forrest Avenue forms the western border of the park, and the tennis courts on East River Road take up the eastern portion. On the north side, the shops on Carton Street and the Rumson Recreation buildings all sit on property that was once part of one of Rumson's old estates. Incidentally, the sports equipment buildings were once the Red Rock Bottling Company, a soft drink factory that manufactured sodas so good as to be memorable to this day by those who enjoyed them many decades ago. The Leonard/Borden family sold the factory buildings and property to the Borough many years ago. This area was a section of Rumson once called "Carton Town" in deference to the blacksmith shop owned by James Carton that stood for decades near the site of The Battle of Black Point on the corner of Black Point Road and East River Road. The New Central Hotel, now Val's Tavern, flourished on the other side of Carton Street, an interesting neighbor for an upscale mansion and estate.

The history of this property was nearly forgotten until research and interviews of older residents brought it to light. Built around 1900, the estate had a beautiful mansion with sweeping veranda like porches, a working orchard and nursery. The photograph on the cover shows rows of greenhouse structures and a tall windmill. Bill Scalzo grew up nearby and remembers braving terrible stinging nettle grass to get to the apple trees. He said that the apples were so good that it was worth the effort. He remembers that the house was set on a little hill and that there was a little florist shop and greenhouse on the Forrest Avenue side where products of the farm and gardens were sold. No one remembers rather the estate and farm had a name. The piece of Rumson history that is of the most significance is the fact that the owner of the estate was Frank McMahon, the first Mayor of Rumson. Mr. McMahon was born in 1861 on a farm in what is now Fair Haven. His father worked for the A. Hance Nurseries, the remnants of which make up our Meadow Ridge Park. He attended the one room school in Fair Haven and pursued a career in banking in New York. A self-made man, he rose to the position of President of the Red Bank Branch of the Second National Bank and Trust Company, which, through the years has evolved into the First Union Bank. He was active in public affairs and was an advocate of extending the trolley line that operated from Red Bank to Hintelman's Corner. According to Fair Haven historian T.J. McMahon, Thomas McCarter was asked to be Rumson's first mayor, and Mr. McMahon was the logical and popular choice after Mr. McCarter declined the posi-

tion. The Borough of Rumson, once a portion of Shrewsbury Township, was incorporated by Senate Bill 80, which was introduced in the New Jersey Senate on February 4, 1907. The incorporation was approved at a special election held at Oceanic Fire House on June 18, 1907. THE RED BANK REGISTER reported, "A public meeting to nominate officers of the new borough will be held...there is to be no politics in the first election of officers for the new borough, and the meeting will be open to all citizens, whether they are Republicans, Democrats, Prohibitionists or Socialists. The name of Frank McMahon still leads as the choice for mayor. Mr. McMahon is averse to accepting the office from a personal standpoint, but the people who want to see the new borough prosper, tell him that he should not let his personal desires stand in the way of a public duty." Mr. McMahon served as Mayor of Rumson from 1907 until 1910 when his first wife died. He later retired from the bank and passed away in 1939 survived by his second wife and a son who became a member of the Rumson Borough Council. In 1940, Peter Cerrina opened a restaurant, Peter's Piping Rock, on the corner of Avenue of Two Rivers and Ridge Road. The building is now the home of The Fromagerie. The restaurant was upscale and had a reputation for fine food. In an early description, it was noted for its "Chicken Piping Rock", "Beef a la Dutch" and home-made rum cake. The dining room accommodated only 125 diners, and Peter Cerrina sought a larger venue. In 1945, he purchased the property that is now Piping Rock Park. The purchase price for the entire parcel was \$5,000, and, according to a 19 5 8 tax file, it was insured for \$10,000. He converted the mansion for use as Peter's Piping Rock restaurant and ran it successfully for nearly 20 years. For some time, Nick Egidio managed Peter's Piping Rock, and he went on to purchase the original building where he opened The Colony restaurant. Every person interviewed remembers Peter's Piping Rock as "THE place to go!" Dishes such as Lobster Thermador, frogs legs and potatoes au gratin were remembered fondly, and the atmosphere was one of elegance. Peter Cerrina had chicken coops on the property where he raised his own chickens; it is unclear rather they supplied the kitchen needs for "Chicken Piping Rock" or merely for eggs. In the early 1960's, after Peter Cerrina's death, his wife sold the property to the Borough, and a Green Acres matching grant made it possible to turn it into a park. The former mansion/restaurant was demolished, and the tennis courts were built on the site. As the bulldozers move the earth around, will apple tree roots or Battle of Monmouth bullets or soda bottle shards appear? With such a long history, Piping Rock Park may still have some surprises to share. The McHeffey Foundation estimates that the cost of the project will exceed \$100,000 in total expenses. Through the kick-off gathering and earlier events, the Foundation has attracted over 2,000 supporters and is being generously sponsored by many local businesses. For information on how to contribute, check the website at www.keithmcheffeyfoundation.com.