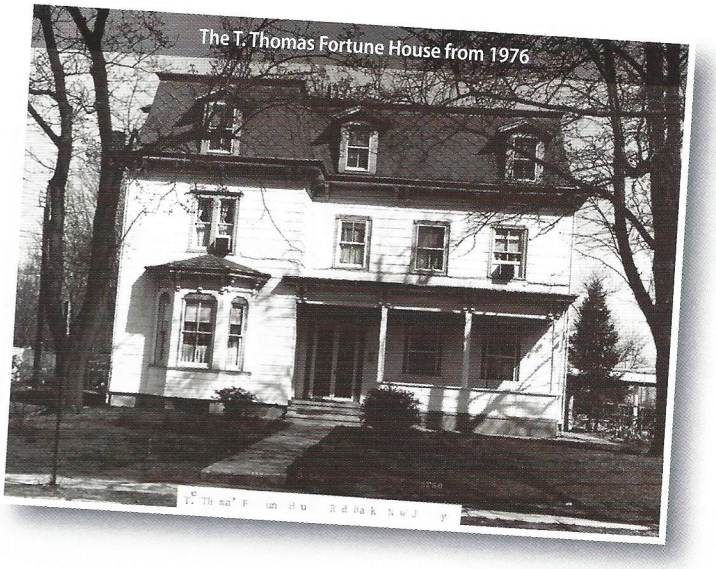
Historic Havens

by Lori Draz

The Monmouth County Archives


The T. Thomas Fortune House from 1976

Many Monmouth County historic hounds are unaware that there is a lair of historic treasures to be found at the Monmouth County Archives in Manalapan. Homeowners, architects, construction professionals, writers, and preservationists will be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of collected data.

Since 1675, the Monmouth County Clerk – a position held today by Christine Giordano Hanlon – has been the keeper of the records and is responsible for maintaining real property transfers and interests in the county. These records are available online at the Monmouth County Open Public Records Search website and in person at the Monmouth County Clerk's Office in Freehold and the Monmouth County Archives Division of the County Clerk in Manalapan. The division holds over 7,000 building contracts for private homes and public buildings, like train stations, mostly from 1880 to 1920.

County Clerk Hanlon with Monmouth County Archivist Gary Saretzky

If you would like to research a property's history, it is best to start with the property's deed, which records changes in land ownership. These documents create a chain of title from the current owner going back in time, identifying the owners of the property over the years. Deeds can be searched for free online from 1976 to the present on the Open Public Records Search website. Deeds recorded before 1976 were recorded in deed books and are available for in-person research at the Monmouth County Clerk's Office in Freehold. The County Clerk's Office also maintains thousands of maps documenting subdivisions, as well as other types of maps, which are accessible on the Open Public Records Search website under County Clerk.

If you're doing more in-depth research about a property and its owners, the Monmouth County Archives Division in Manalapan preserves map collections and stores additional property records, such as older court records, road returns, mechanic liens, etc. The Archives Division also stores historical records for some Monmouth County municipalities, which can also be searched and viewed on the Open Public Records Search website.

The Jane G. Clayton Research Room at the Archives Division

About 99 percent of the Monmouth County Archives' records, as described on the Archives website, are open to the public. Many have been digitized and are available online at the Open Public Records Search or available by request using online searchable databases. Additionally, there are many remaining documents that are still in being organized and indexed and the Monmouth County Archives' staff welcomes volunteers to help in indexing and making records available to the public. Many of the volunteers work from home and on special projects.

The facility is handicapped accessible, with an elevator that will take patrons to its downstairs floor, where they can use the Jane G. Clayton Research Room. It's free to search the Archives; however, there is a small fee for papers copies, at five cents per page. Records Analyst and Research Assistant George Joynson is available to aid research by phone, email, and in person for visits. An appointment for researching is recommended and can be made by phone or email.

The Monmouth County Clerk's Office in Freehold can be reached at (732) 431-7324, opt. 3 and the Monmouth County Archives Division of the County Clerk in Manalapan can be reached at (732) 308-2828.

Monmouth County is home to many historic sites and properties, which are preserved and restored to educate the public about the county's ancestry. This past July, T. Thomas Fortune's house in Red Bank was saved from demolition and approved by the borough's zoning board to be restored. Historic homes such as the T. Thomas Fortune House or private properties such as your home can be researched at the Monmouth County Clerk's facilities.