



Settled in
1665

RUMSON

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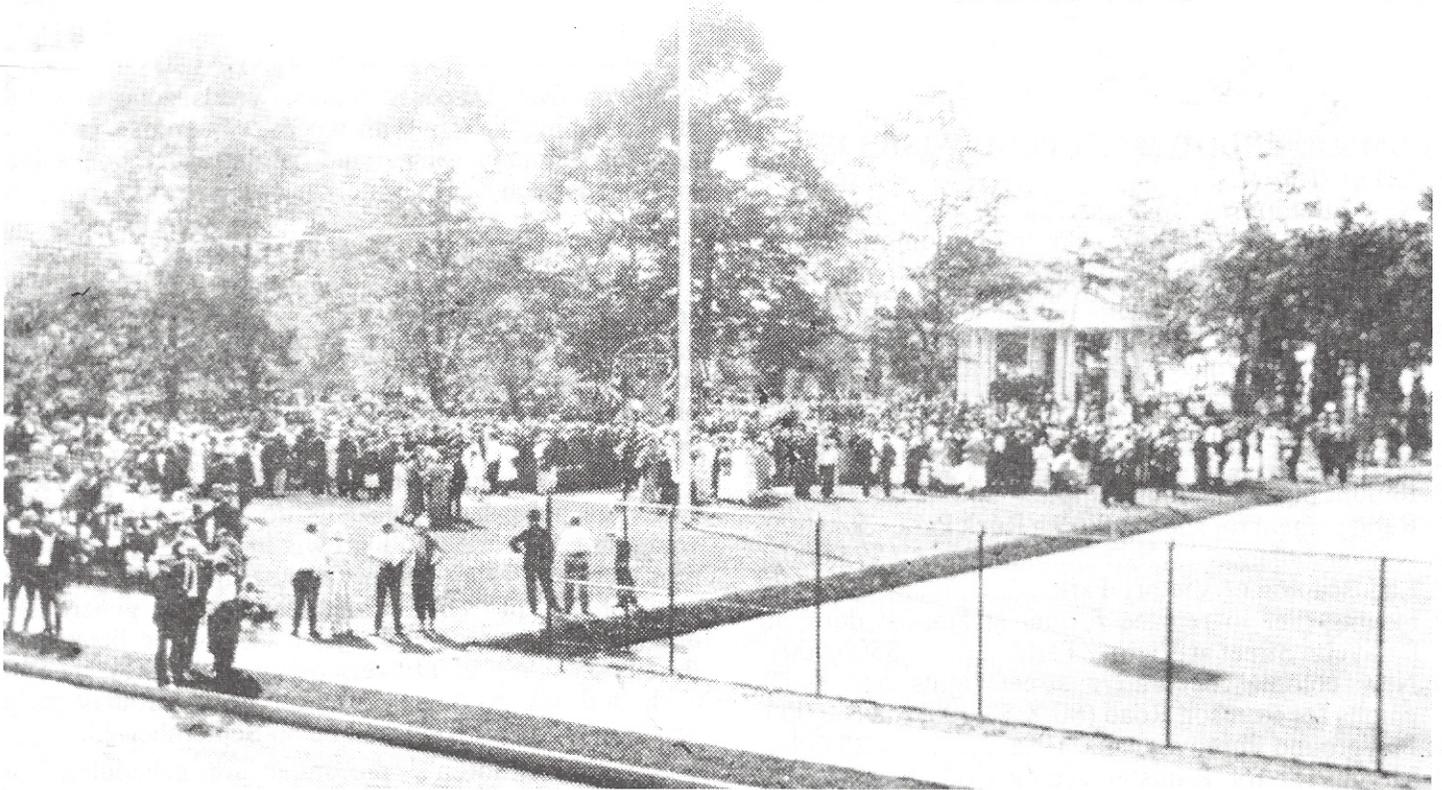
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Dedication of Victory Park, July 4, 1920. Bertram H. Borden donated the land and generously provided the funds for the development of Victory Park. See article enclosed on the Rumson Endowment Fund.

monmouth county retrospect

by **LYSBETH NEWMAN**

A little over 100 years ago, Victory Park, which is bordered on the south by River Road, the north by the Navesink River, the east by Lafayette Street, and the west by the deLamos and Chemey property, was a portion of a larger tract of land owned by Augustus Ligier. On the property, which was mostly fields, was a farm house that served as the residence of Mr. & Mrs. Ligier and their six children.

In 1880, Mr. Ligier built a new home just to the west of the park property and moved his family there. During excavation for this building, many arrowheads and bones, presumed to be those of Indians, were found.

Following the move, Mr. Ligier converted his former home into a hotel which he called the Oceanic Inn. He also built a number of small shacks along the waterfront which he rented to campers who came down from the cities by rail or steamboat to summer in Rumson, or Oceanic as it was known then.

Mr. Ligier ran the Inn until about 1887 when he leased it to the Lovall Brothers who operated it for three years as a dance hall.

The next leasee was Mr. Joseph Howe of New York City who was known to the local residents as "Hungry Joe." It was during this time that the need for a new steamboat dock became apparent, as the one

being used at Washington Street was to be extended across the river making a bridge between Oceanic and Locust.

The Oceanic Dock Committee was formed and a new dock was erected at the foot of Lafayette Street. On June 6, 1891, the Sea Bird made the first of many landings at this new pier.

As early as 1831, steamboats were shipping local produce and manufactured goods between New York and Red Bank, but by 1891 passenger transportation had taken precedence over the freight trade and the paddlewheelers were making daily stops at the dock in Oceanic. Of all the steamboats plying the waters of the Navesink, the most popular and fondly remembered were the Sea Bird, a 187 footer which sailed from 1866-1926, and the Albertina, a 174 footer which sailed from 1882-1932. Many of the people who came on these beautiful paddlewheelers were not content to be just "day visitors" and soon Oceanic became a popular place for "city folk" to summer. Several of these families became permanent residents and their descendants still reside in Rumson.

Next to run the Oceanic Inn was a Mr. Joseph Little who, because of connections in the boxing world, had many famous fighters visit the Inn. One summer, Kid Lavigne, the world champion lightweight, worked out there and Jim Jeffrey, a former heavy-weight champion, trained for his first fight there.

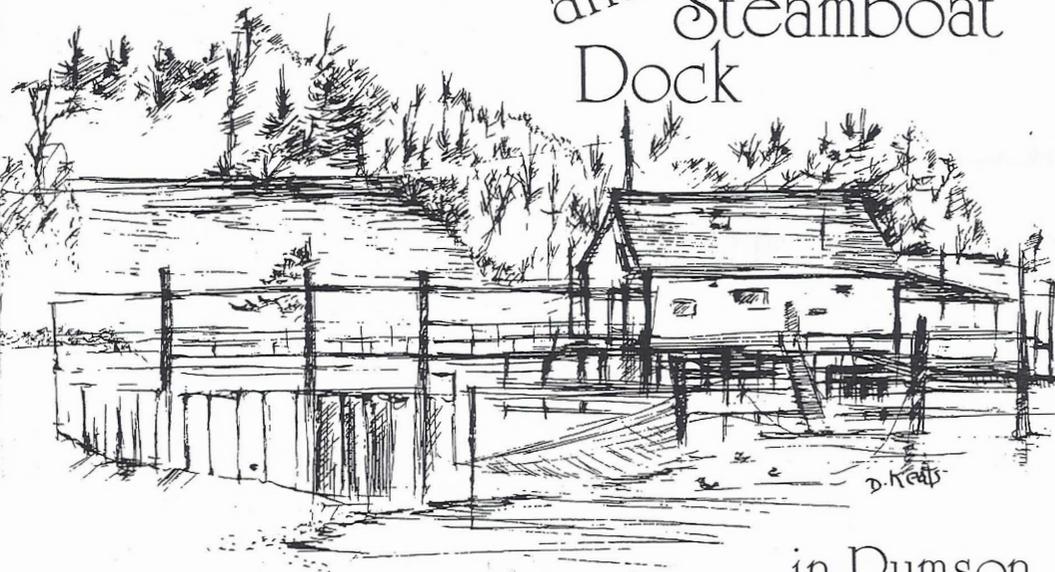
Mr. Arthur Brill, an Oceanic resident, was the last leasee of the Inn and, during his tenure, the place was frequented by such colorful characters as "Diamond Lou," a local woman, and "Diamond Dick," a flashy Mexican from Red Bank. After being insulted by the bouncer one night, "Diamond Dick" left the place, came back with a gun and shot the bouncer in the leg leaving him with a limp for the rest of his life.

Reverend Arthur McKay, pastor of the Presbyterian Church from 1911-1926 who felt the Inn was a bad influence on the community, waged a very controversial, but successful campaign to close the place down.

The property was subsequently purchased from Mr. Ligier's widow by Mr. Bertram H. Borden for the purpose of creating a park for Rumson residents. The Inn and most of the dilapidated shacks were torn down — the few remaining shacks were relocated to other parts of town.

Bathhouses with shower facilities were built near the river, handball and tennis courts were constructed, a bandstand was built, and a flagpole, and monument honoring Rumson residents who served in World War I were erected. With the addition of swings, a sliding board, see-saws, benches, water fountains, shrubbery, and stone paths, the park was completed, and a full-time caretaker, a woman in charge of the bathhouses and a teacher for the arts and crafts

VICTORY PARK and the Steamboat Dock



in Rumson

of the war years, residents gathered at the lighted Christmas tree in the park for a carol sing, a tradition still carried on today. The school band supplied the music and the words were projected on a screen by a lantern slide.

On December 19, 1946, the park was deeded to the Borough of Rumson by the Mary Owen Borden Memorial Foundation with the stipulation that they "maintain it in the same manner and under the same type and degree of supervision as it had been kept." Other provisions of the deed were that the borough "provide for the decoration of the growing Christmas tree, sponsor and continue the annual Christmas services," and "provide for adequate music for the carol singing."



The trees and shrubbery have grown, a monument honoring World War II veterans has been erected, and the tennis courts are now illuminated for night tennis, but people are still enjoying the activities and the beauty and tranquility of Victory Park much the same as they did 60 years ago.

program were hired.

On July 4, 1920, in impressive ceremonies attended by most of the residents as well as many dignitaries, Victory Memorial Park was dedicated to the community of Rumson as a gift of Mr. & Mrs. Borden in memory of the Rumson men who served in World War I.

The park soon became the focal point of the town's summer activities. There were games and contests, maypole dances, swimming and boating races, tennis, arts and crafts, and night roller skating on the illuminated handball court. There were also weekly band concerts. Local youths formed the band, and Mr. Borden supplied uniforms and hired a Band Master from New York to direct them.

Up until 1942, Labor Day, which signified the "end of the summer," was a day of fun and games at the park for the children, and winners of the contests were awarded medals.

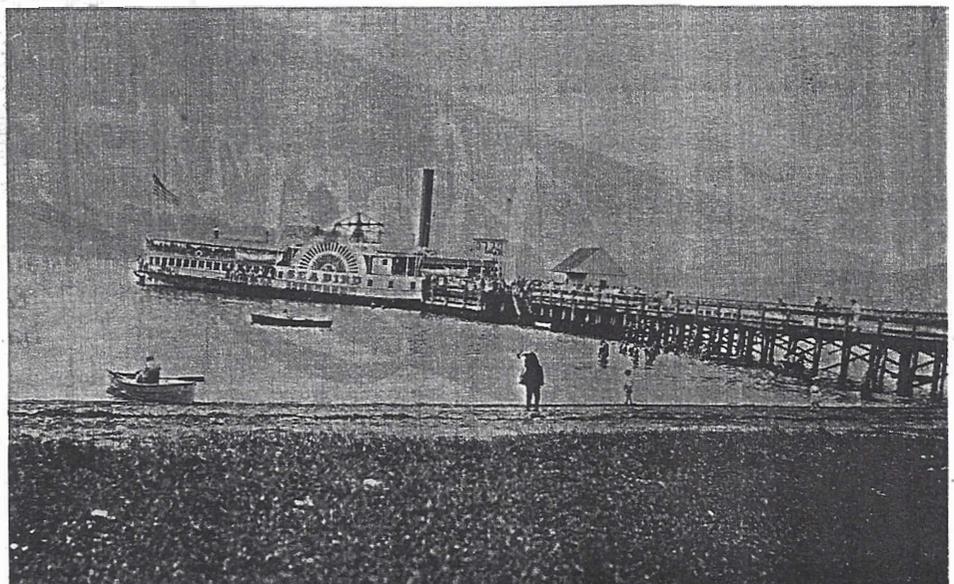
The steamboat dock became a favorite place for residents to gather and discuss the local news while awaiting the arrival of the Sea Bird and the Albertina. Adults, as well as children, enjoyed fishing and crabbing from the dock, and every child who grew up in Rumson or summered

there can remember diving off the pilings into the river.

The early 1930's brought with them the end of the steamboating era on the Navesink River. The dock continued to be a popular place for swimming, crabbing and fishing, but over the years fell into a sorry state of disrepair. Due to prohibitive costs of rebuilding, and other legal entanglements, the borough had it demolished in 1973.

Every Christmas, with the exception

SEABIRD at the Steamboat Dock in Rumson, early 1920's. Photo courtesy of A. Elizabeth Smith of Rumson.



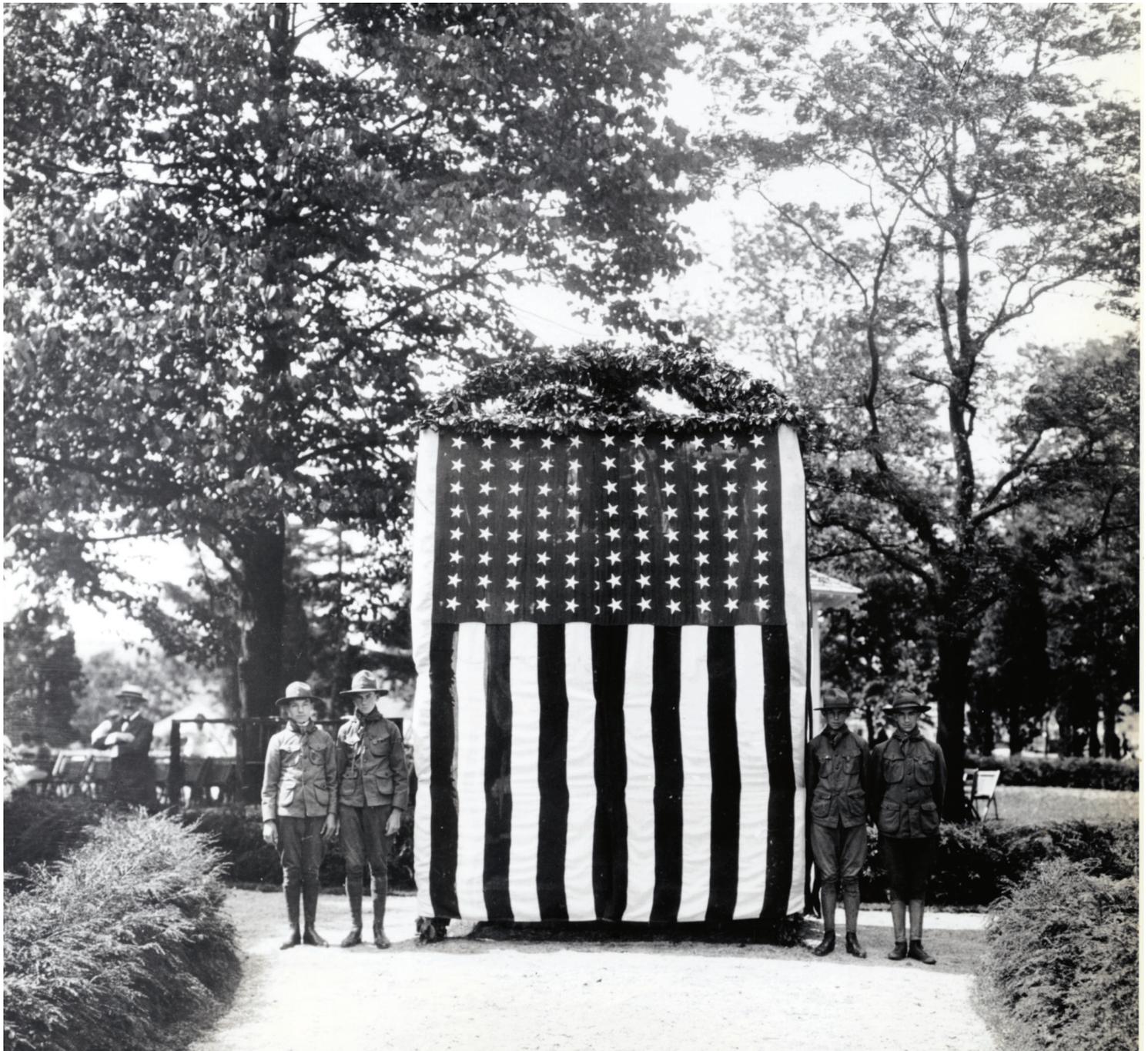


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A highlight of the July 1920 dedication of Victory Park was the unveiling of the new World War I monument, shown here flanked by young Servicemen.