



## Poricy Park Conservancy

### A Primer on the Murray Farmhouse and Barn

A Registered New Jersey State Historic Site



The Murray farmhouse and barn at Poricy Park, Middletown are outstanding examples of middle class structures from Colonial times. Built ca. 1770 by Joseph Murray, a stonemason from Ireland, the farmhouse and barn remain on original foundations. Simple plastered walls and brick fireplaces underscore the sturdiness and charm of the original five-room house. In the rolling fields setting of Poricy Park, a tour through the farmhouse and barn includes few intrusions from the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



In 1667, John Throckmorton received a grant of lands that included the area now known as Poricy Park. Thomas Stillwell purchased acreage from Throckmorton and it was from Thomas Stillwell Jr. that Joseph Murray bought his 40 acres in 1767.

Joseph Murray came with his mother from the Province of Ulster, Ireland in 1767. He was intent on escaping the turmoil of Ireland and wanted to farm peacefully in the Jersey Colony. Here he met and married Rebecca Morris. Of Welsh descent, Rebecca's family had lived in Monmouth County for several generations. Rebecca was one of twenty children born to Richard Morris and his two or three successive wives. Joseph and Rebecca had four children, William, James, Joseph and a daughter (whose name we have never discovered).

With the onset of the Revolutionary War, Joseph's dream of peaceful farming was interrupted. Joseph joined the local militia and was openly defiant of British rule. His home was raided, looted and personal belongings were burned. Joseph was sent to prison in New York City. But by January of 1780, Joseph was again in Middletown and had rejoined his regiment.

Next comes the family story of one of Joseph's most daring deeds. Joseph's militia was ordered to "commandeer" horses for the patriots. Joseph went to Edward Taylor's home "Marlpit Hall" on King's Highway, Middletown to find a horse. He

went in broad daylight. Needless to say, Edward Taylor heard and saw Joseph and tried to stop the theft by throwing his very fine hat at the horse and rider. With quick and deft and action, Joseph caught the hat and rode off with a fine new hat and the horse. Joseph was now a marked man. Horse stealing was punishable by death.

The evening of June 7, 1780, Joseph and his neighbor Thomas Hill were again active for their militia regiment. This time they were reconnoitering (spying on the British) at Sandy Hook - a task given only to the most fearless. Joseph and Thomas were granted leave to go home the next morning to work their fields. As was the custom in those dangerous times, Thomas would stand guard as Joseph worked and then Joseph would return the protection for Thomas.

June 8, 1780 was a quiet, sunny day and Joseph felt safe enough to release Thomas from his guard duty. Thomas had not reached his farm before he heard shots ring out. Three men had come out of the woods along Poricy Brook and shot Joseph. They had to use their bayonets to be sure their dastardly deed was done. Joseph lay dead in his cornfield. It is generally believed that the three assassins were in the employ of Edward Taylor and the shooting was in retaliation for the horse theft.

Rebecca stayed on the farm with her four children and received a widow's pension for a number of years. The pension ceased when she remarried and became Rebecca Patterson. We assume that she moved from the farm at that time.

The property stayed in the possession of the Murray family until 1861. It was approximately 1840 that a Murray grandson added on to the house. The addition was retained during restoration to afford more room for programs. The property was farmed and the farmhouse inhabited until it was purchased in 1973 by Middletown Township. The purchase was made at the encouragement of the Poricy Park Citizens Committee to save the land from development. The 250 acres now known as Poricy Park were acquired by Middletown Township through a succession of land purchases from 1970 to 1973. In 1973, the historic significance of the farmhouse and barn were unknown. Use and general repair of the buildings led to research revealing the rich history of the Murray's and their property. The barn was restored in 1978 and the farmhouse in 1981. They are still the property of Middletown Township and are maintained by the Poricy Park Conservancy.