

TAKING A LOOK BACK: A HISTORICAL VIGNETTE

Sprawling municipality now tiny

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Call it the incredible shrinking township. Once a geographic giant encompassing most of present-day Monmouth and Ocean counties, Shrewsbury Township has been whittled away over the centuries to one of the state's smallest towns, a village of three streets and a single store.

One of the three original towns of Monmouth County, Shrewsbury Township was created in 1693 along with Middletown and Freehold Township.

Monmouth, which was formed in 1664, also included most of present-day Ocean

County. Middletown covered the northern end of the county, Freehold Township the west, and Shrewsbury Township encompassed the rest.

Extending all the way from the Navesink River to Little Egg Harbor, the sparsely settled township soon began to splinter as settlers filled its distant corners and sought their own local governments.

First to secede was Upper Freehold, formed in 1730 from sections of both Shrewsbury and Freehold townships.

Stafford, which split next, in 1749, also

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included present-day Eagleswood and Ocean Township.

Carved off in 1767, Dover Township included within its boundaries present-day Manchester, Berkeley, Lacey, Lakewood, Jackson and Plumsted, part of Brick, and Island

Heights, Beachwood, South Toms River, Ocean Gate and Pine Beach.

Howell separated in 1801. Its own progeny would include Wall, Farmingdale, Belmar, Manasquan, Spring Lake, Sea Girt, Brielle, South Belmar and Spring Lake Heights.

Atlantic Township, which later changed its name to Colts Neck, left in 1847.

Ocean Township split in 1849 and was eventually carved into a bevy of towns: Eatontown, Oceanport, West Long Branch, Neptune, Neptune City, Bradley Beach, Asbury Park, Avon, Ocean Grove, Sea Bright, Deal,

Long Branch, Monmouth Beach, Interlaken and Loch Arbour.

But the good-byes did not stop with the 19th century.

Shrewsbury split in 1926, and New Shrewsbury Township, which later changed its name to Tinton Falls, left in 1950.

All that was left of Shrewsbury Township was less than a square mile of military housing built for nearby Fort Monmouth — an enclave of three roads with a single entrance off of Shrewsbury Avenue.

Today the tiny township comprises three housing developments.

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