

TAVI Town Specials

February 20, 2024

Honors for Allentown —

Research reveals second Congressional Gold Medal recipient

Allentown has ANOTHER Congressional Gold Medal honoree: Marion Van Orkey - born and raised in Allentown, who served in the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion of the Women's Army Corps. during World War II. The Battalion consisted of 855 African American women who worked in England, Scotland and France to sort mail sent to about 7 million American soldiers and government workers stationed in Europe by the end of the war.

Ms. Van Orkey's service came to light as a result of ongoing research into the story of Jefferson D. Johnson, who grew up in Allentown and attended Allentown High School. When war broke out, Jeff Johnson enlisted and became one of the first African American Marines, among 20,000 trained at Montford Point, North Carolina —



Marion Van Orkey



Corp. Jeff Johnson

TAVI is proud to present the story of Jeff Johnson and his fellow Montford Point Marines in a special Black History Month presentation, "A Few Good Men" on Saturday, February 24, 2024 beginning at 6 pm in Allentown Methodist Church, 23 Church Street, Allentown. Mr. Kelly Atkinson, president of the New Jersey chapter of the National Montford Marines Association will share this remarkable story. The program begins with a pasta dinner (\$5 suggested donation). Please register to attend at www.allentownvinj.org

Ms. Van Orkey and Mr. Johnson were honored with Congressional Gold Medals, our nation's highest civilian award. Join us on February 24th to hear the amazing story!



"A Few Good Men" is part of TAVI's "Allentown Arts" program showcasing the history and talent of our community. Allentown Arts is made possible in part by a grant from Monmouth Arts a partner of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, and the Monmouth County Board of County Commissioners.

WHO LIES THERE?

You may be closer than you think to graves that tell our town's story!

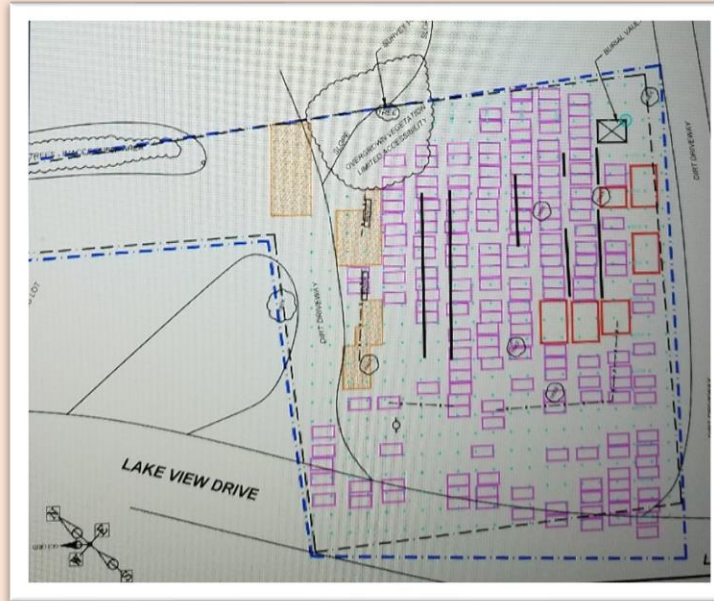
Editor's Note: This is a continuation of a series about the Olde Burying Ground located off Lakeview Drive in Allentown. TAVI's efforts to restore this important local landmark are ongoing.

The Olde Burying Ground on Lakeview Drive may look like a tidy, clearly marked resting place, but over 200 years have passed since the first burial at the site, while our community has grown around it. Borders have blurred as memories have faded.

What we see today within split-railed fencing is only part of the cemetery's original area. For decades graves were forgotten and the cemetery itself was considered abandoned. In 2021 the Borough of Allentown surveyed the site as part of a court action to obtain ownership of the cemetery. The results were quite a surprise, clearly showing graves well outside the currently marked cemetery boundaries.

The reality is that there are folks buried under Lakeview Drive as well as under an alleyway next to the current fence (see survey diagram above).

So, who are we driving over? We don't really know. Their head stones, of course, are long gone. We might be able to blame British soldiers who stabled their horses in the tiny church which once stood on the cemetery grounds. We may have won the Revolution, but the British



Radar plot of graves under alley & Lakeview Dr.

allegedly trashed the cemetery records in the process.

For generations some of our forebears lay forgotten as we made our way around town. They fought and lived and died in and for the community we call home. Now that we know

they're there, it seems only right that we respect their final resting place. How that will actually come to pass remains to be seen – stay tuned!

For more information, take TAVI's Cemetery Tour at www.allentownvinj.org



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It's time for **“Souper Saturday”** at the **First Baptist Church of Allentown**

Don't miss this year's “Souper Saturday” on Saturday (of course) February 24, 2024 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at First Baptist Church, 72 Waker Ave. (Rt. 526) in Allentown. Delicious soup, chili and baked goods along with your favorite local vendors, prizes and a tricky tray auction (drawing at 1:30) all benefit the Church's scholarship fund. Check out the QR



code for more information, call (609) 259-9177 or visit www.firstbaptistallentownnj.org.



Actual soup -- and servers -- may vary.

Help Solve “The Mystery in the Woods”

Tucked away off Route 524 in Upper Freehold, the Olde Robbins Burial Place holds the graves of Revolutionary War and Civil War veterans as well as that of the great grand-aunt of President Abraham Lincoln. It's an important part of community history, but until recently, the site was overgrown and abandoned. Now TAVI and Robbins family descendants have begun a restoration and regular maintenance of the area. The site has also been added to



TAVI's "Historic Cemetery Trail Driving Tour." TAVI needs your help to continue the work this spring – Please share a few hours of your time so that the stories of those who rest there are not lost to future generations. **Sign up for this**

year's first clean-up of the site and help solve “The mystery in the woods.”

Robbins Burial Place Clean-up

Saturday, March 16,
2024 at 9 a.m.

Rain Date: 3/23/24

Route 524, Upper
Freehold (look for the
roadside marker)

Register at

www.allentownvinj.org

For more info call
(609) 208-9991

Introducing —



ALLENTOWN

OLD MILL

TAVI's Guide to Fun, Learning, & Adventure in Historic Allentown & Upper Freehold



UPPER
FREEHOLD

SCENIC BYWAY

Whether it's fun things to do or learn, good food to eat, unique places to shop, or all of the above, you can find these experiences and more within

the local environs of historic Allentown and Upper Freehold, New Jersey. The many travelers who drive through on their way “down the Shore” often miss the numerous attractions and cultural sites that define our locale.

That's why TAVI has created its “**Guide to Fun, Learning & Adventure in Historic Allentown & Upper Freehold,**” now available online at www.allentownvinj.org. Take a journey to a bygone era with one of TAVI's walking tours or tour the scenic countryside by car. Browse our many boutiques and enjoy a hearty meal, or just a snack. Come for one of our community's annual events or festivals. Enjoy the great outdoors in the Assunpink, Clayton and other parks. It's all in TAVI's free, comprehensive guide for visitors and residents alike.

So, please take some time, and join us in celebrating our shared past, enjoying the present, and looking forward to a bright future.

Warehouse Roundup....

This is a continuation of TAVI's efforts to share information about pending applications to construct warehouses in and around the Allentown-Upper Freehold community. The current spate of pending warehouse proposals, if approved, will impact our entire community. TAVI encourages you to be informed, aware and engaged.

The Sites:

- 1 "The Stein Property" – Two warehouses covering 23 acres in Upper Freehold, bordering the Allentown neighborhood beginning at Probasco Dr.
- 2 Mercer Corporate Park – Two warehouses covering 45 acres in Robbinsville, bordering Allentown off Church St / Robbinsville-Allentown Rd.
- 3 "The Whittenborn Property" – 20 acres in Robbinsville listed for \$4.5 million and currently "pending" sale, bordering Indian Lake and neighborhoods off Church Street.



The Status: The **Upper Freehold Planning Board** will hold a public meeting in Stone Bridge Middle School at 7 pm on Tuesday, February 27, 2024 to consider applications affecting the **Stein Property**.

The **Borough of Allentown** has agreed to withdraw its opposition to the **Mercer Corporate Park** warehouses in return for \$400,000 and the construction of a steel "truck height barrier" in the left-hand turn lane exiting the warehouses. Settlement monies can only be used for stormwater management along Indian Run and open space or recreation projects. The Borough's decision leaves resident members of **TASC – The Alliance for Sustainable Communities** - without the support of their municipality in the continuing fight against the **Mercer Corporate Park** development, which is less than one mile from the **Stein Property**. TASC's litigation to stop construction is pending in the Appellate Division of State Court.

The Issues: **Non-resident developers** assert their property rights to construct warehouse facilities which they say will support commerce and create jobs. Opposing the warehouse proposals, **residents** point to increased traffic, noise and light pollution, destruction of wildlife habitat and historic farmland, security concerns, and flooding caused by acres of buildings and parking lots close to their homes. Governing bodies in **Robbinsville** and **Upper Freehold Township**, thus far, appear to be acquiescing to warehouse development as a permissible use of land within their jurisdictions which is also a source of tax revenue.



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“Lettuce Begin” Kicks off the Gardening Season

Hot on the heels of Punxsutawney Phil’s Groundhog Day prediction of an early spring, the Allentown Garden Club presents “Lettuce Begin” on March 14, 2024 beginning at 7 pm in Allentown Methodist Church, 23 Church Street, Allentown. Lesley Parness will tell you everything you need to know about growing a successful crop of lettuce (almost) all summer long and well into fall. Learn why Roman chef Epicus watered his lettuce with wine and why Peter, Flopsy and Mopsy were always asleep in the lettuce patch. Hear tips about site selection, seed starting, lettuce types, and more.

Ms. Parness connects people with plants through science and stories. She served as the Superintendent of Horticultural Education at New Jersey's Morris County Park Commission where she oversaw programming and interpretation at The Frelinghuysen Arboretum, Willowood Arboretum and Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center. Her column, The Garden Historian, is featured bi-monthly in Gardener News Magazine.

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Improvements to Ashby Park Coming this Spring

The Monmouth Conservation Foundation is pleased to share news of improvements coming to Sergeant George Ashby Memorial Park in Allentown. The park, located between North Main and Hamilton Streets is adjacent to Allentown African Methodist Episcopal Church Cemetery. Sergeant Ashby, Sergeant James Woby, a hero in the Battle of Gettysburg, and 168 other members of the Black community – both

known and unknown – who were active in the Underground Railroad or served in the Civil War, are buried in the cemetery. Given its historical significance, the cemetery is recognized as part of the [Black Cemetery Network](#).

Thanks to a matching grant from [Monmouth County's Municipal Open Space Grant Program](#), the Borough of Allentown will be installing new fencing around the cemetery and making other improvements at parks in the historic Borough. Work is expected to begin this spring, conducted by Roberts Engineering Group.



Sgt. Ashby pictured late in life sitting on the front porch of his Waker Avenue home holding a rifle.



George Ashby's Waker Ave. home, where he and his wife Phoebe raised 9 children.

WHO WAS GEORGE ASHBY?

George Ashby was born in Burlington, New Jersey, on January 25, 1844. In 1864, Ashby enlisted as a private in the 45th United States Colored Infantry. He served in Virginia during the siege of Petersburg and was present for the Confederate surrender at Appomattox Court House in April 1865. Ashby was promoted several times until he reached the rank of first sergeant of Company H. Sergeant Ashby was mustered out of the service at Philadelphia with the 45th in November 1865 and returned to his life as a New Jersey small farmer. After the war, he married Phoebe Cole and lived on Waker Avenue in Allentown. In January 1944, Ashby was interviewed and predicted an allied victory in World War II. He stated that if he could, he would “enlist all over again.” George Ashby died in Allentown on April 26, 1946 at the age of 102, and was the last surviving New Jersey Civil War veteran. He had 9 children, 16 grandchildren, 14 great-grandchildren and 7 great-great-grandchildren at the time of his death. Ashby received a military funeral complete with color guard and firing squad and was buried in the Allentown A. M. E. church cemetery.

Save the Dates --

3rd Annual Daffodil Days

*Back better than ever,
featuring over 10,000
daffodils across town.*

*Make plans now to be part of
the celebration!*

Featuring:

Saturday, April 20, 2024 –

*ABCA's "Spring Stroll" street fair.
Contact AllentownSpringStroll@gmail.com for
vendor reservations.*

Sunday, April 21, 2024 –

*TAVI's "Welcome Spring Gala" – an
elegant evening of dining with the music of
Patrica Landy. Tickets on sale now at
www.allentownvinj.org*

***Plus: Special strolls around
town, Earth Day, events and
sales at local shops – Stay tuned
for the full Calendar of Events
coming soon!***

The Allentown Village Initiative

