

# Welcome to the Bayshore Waterfront Park Activity Center (*Historic Seabrook-Wilson House*)



Listed on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places, the Seabrook–Wilson House is one of the oldest surviving houses in the Bayshore. The Seabrook-Wilson House began as a small cabin about 1720 and over the years was expanded and altered many times by later generations. By 1896 (photo left) the house had grown to its present size and appearance.

For most of its history, the farm on Sandy Hook Bay was home to generations of two prominent Port Monmouth families, the Seabrooks

and the Wilsons. Ship owners and captains, a Revolutionary War militia officer, local business owners and investors, and a clergyman were part of these notable families, many of whom served in local government positions.

Until the mid 1800s, the Seabrook-Wilson House stood alone on this stretch of the Bayshore, surrounded by a farm of several hundred acres and salt marsh. With the development of steamboat service and the railroads in the mid-1800s, the village of Port Monmouth grew up around the steamboat pier and commercial fishing, transforming the area into a bustling port. Tourists flocked to the area for its fresh air, sandy beaches and recreational fishing. By the early 1900s the old Seabrook-Wilson farmhouse had become an inn for tourists, known first as “Bay Side Manor” and later as “The White House.”

After almost fifty years as a boarding house and tavern, the Seabrook-Wilson House stood empty and in severe disrepair by the mid 1960s. Concerned Middletown residents convinced Township officials to purchase the site in 1967 and save the Bayshore landmark from destruction. The Middletown Township Historical Society and, later, the Spy House Museum Corporation, operated the house as a local history museum for over twenty years.

In 1998, Middletown Township transferred the property to the County of Monmouth and it became part of the surrounding Bayshore Waterfront Park, which preserves a thriving coastal landscape of salt marsh, dunes, mile of beach and scenic views across the water. Visitors can once again enjoy the historic site and create new memories of Port Monmouth and the Sandy Hook Bay.

***Please visit the new exhibits in the Activity Center about the ecology of the Sandy Hook Bay, growth and change of the Seabrook-Wilson House and the families who lived here through the generations, and the vital connection between this site and the greater Bayshore community.***

## **The Seabrook-Wilson House Restoration Q&A**

### **What was the purpose of the restoration project?**

The objective of the Seabrook-Wilson House restoration was to return the exterior of the landmark to its documented historic appearance, and to renovate the entire building for its new use as Bayshore Waterfront Park's Activity Center.

### **How did the Park System research for the building restoration and the exhibits?**

Monmouth County Park System staff researched historical documents, photographs, and maps from all over the state and region. Local residents also contributed valuable information and many historical photographs. The building itself was investigated with the help of historical architects, Farewell Mills Gatsch of Princeton, who prepared the restoration plans. The research resulted in a more thorough and accurate understanding of the building's origins and changes over time, and guided the restoration plan for the building.

### **What work did the building restoration project include?**

Restoration of the Seabrook-Wilson House included comprehensive exterior and interior repairs to ensure the building's preservation and to provide adequate facilities for public use. The project restored historic fabric and features, repaired structural deterioration, replaced outmoded mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems, and made improvements for the safety of the building and its occupants.

### **When was the restoration completed?**

Construction began in 2008 and was completed in 2009.

### **How was the project funded?**

Funding for the building restoration and site improvements was provided by the County of Monmouth and a grant from the Garden State Historic Preservation Trust Fund administered by the New Jersey Historic Trust/State of New Jersey. The Friends of the Parks funded the exhibits, which were planned and researched by Park System staff, and fabricated by The Cherry Valley Group, an exhibit design/build firm.

### **How will the building be used?**

The building is now Bayshore Waterfront Park's Activity Center, and will function as a site for Park System public programs and special events. The first floor includes a meeting room for public programs and exhibit areas for permanent displays on the ecology of Sandy Hook Bay and the history of the Seabrook-Wilson House. Rooms on the second floor will serve as offices for Park System staff assigned to Bayshore Waterfront Park. Due to code constraints, public access to the second floor is not ordinarily permitted.

