

Mecray family holds reunion in Cape May

Traces roots back to early doctors, pharmacy owners, ship captains

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

CAPE MAY — Mention the Mecray family name to longtime residents here and they will probably mention a doctor, pharmacies and a Ford dealership, but the family's roots go back much earlier to an era when Cape May was known as Cape Island.

On May 11, Mecray family members came together for a reunion topped off with a ceremony in City Hall. Mary Elizabeth Burger said her great-great-grandfather was John Mecray, a river pilot who married Hannah Eldredge in 1805. She said some family members, who traveled from nine states for the reunion, had not seen each other in 40 years. Burger said her first visit to Cape May was in 1927, when she was just one month old.

Kate Wyatt, of the Greater Cape May Historical Society, said the Mecray family's visit to the city was timely since the society was engaged in a project to restore the World War I monument at Columbia and Gurney streets. She said they found the name of John Mecray there on a plaque, noting he was the first Cape May County resident to die in World War I. Jeremiah Eldredge Mecray was a founder of the Kiwanis Club of Cape May, Wyatt said.

Burger said John and Hannah Mecray had three children: Ann, James and Jeremiah. James, born in 1807, also became a river pilot.

"In 1835, a group of 16 citizens, including James, bought the property at Franklin and Lafayette streets from Erin Schellenger to build a school," she said. "It was also used for meetings and church."

James Mecray was the city's first treasurer, Burger said. In 1854, he bought a house now known as the Cherry House for \$1,750 with his cousin William Stites. James Mecray married Mary Anne Mulford and they had six children.

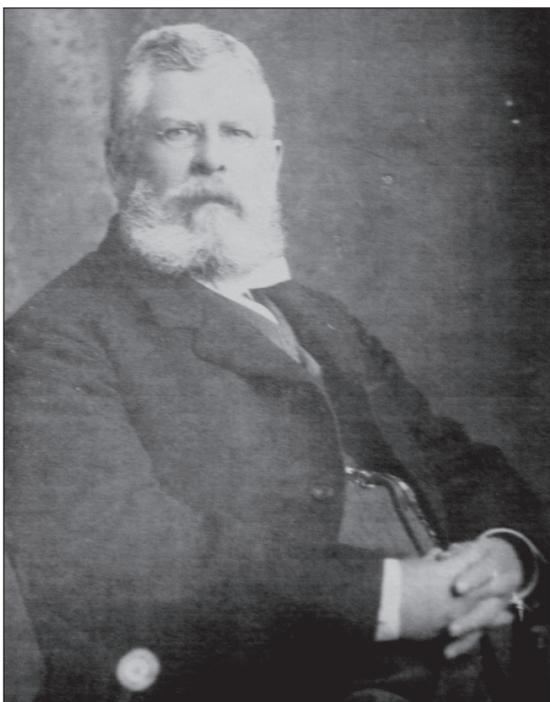
Their son, James Mecray II, became a doctor. Upon graduating from the University of Pennsylvania during the Civil War, he enlisted in the Navy, where he served for two years as a captain and surgeon. Burger said that after leaving the Navy, he built a home at 222 North St. in Cape May.

"His practice and office were at the corner of Congress Place and Perry, although Congress Place wasn't there yet," she said. "The pharmacy was downstairs and his office was upstairs."

She said Dr. James Mecray II helped form the Cape May Fire Association in 1869. Burger said prior to 1873, Cape May did not have a sewage or drainage system for which he advocated, becoming chairman of the board of health.

"While he was in the Navy, he had learned to play the relatively new game of baseball, so when he came back to Cape May, he helped organize the first Cape May baseball club in 1866 and he was president of that," she said.

In 1882, a dispute began with neighbor Memucan Hughes concerning a strip of land of 60 square feet be-



DR. JAMES MECRAY II

Dr. Mecray's son, Paul Mulford Mecray, who also became a doctor, lived to be 102 years old.

Jeremiah Mecray owned the Centre House and other businesses in Cape May, including the city's first Ford dealership, she said. He purchased the block bordered by Benton, Franklin, Sewell and Jefferson streets and subdivided it for several businesses and residences. One business was Mecray Market.

John Mecray was the first soldier from Cape May County to be killed in the Civil War. Frank Mecray was a mayor and commissioner of Cape May. His son, James R. Mecray, owned a fuel oil business and the Mayflower Shop. James R. Mecray's son, John, founded the Merchant's Bank in 1924, according to Burger.

Humphrey Hughes VI, the grandfather of Burger's great-grandmother, was a sea captain.

"During the War of 1812, when the British ships interfered with merchant vessels refusing them entry into Delaware Bay, he led the small militia on Cape

tween their homes, Burger said. Hughes paid \$1 to Mecray to settle the dispute,

she said. Burger donated the original quit claim deed to the historical society.



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE

Mary Elizabeth Burger presents a quit claim deed from 1892 to Diane Muentz of the Greater Cape May Historical Society.

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**Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Long Haul PG 11:00,
1:30, 4:00, 6:40, 9:00
**2D King Arthur: Legend of the Sword PG-13
3:30, 6:50, 9:30
**3D King Arthur: Legend of the Sword PG-13 12:20
**Snatched R 11:30, 1:50, 4:20, 7:40, 9:45
Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2 PG-13 12:30,
3:40, 7:00, 9:50
Beauty and the Beast PG 11:40, 3:20, (7-10, 9:55)
**2D Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No
Tales (Thursday Premiere) PG-13 (7:00)
**3D Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No
Tales (Thursday Premiere) PG-13 (9:45)
Boss Baby PG (11:10, 1:40, 4:10, 6:30, 9:10)
**Baywatch (Wed Premiere) R (7:00, 9:40)
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Island," she said. "A British ship anchored offshore, sent a boat in to ask for fresh water and he refused."

Burger said when the British threatened to fire their cannons, he allowed them a supply of water.

"He was promptly arrested for aiding and abetting the enemy," she said. "Luckily the war ended soon, so he wasn't shot for treason."

According to family lore, Hughes and his crew on the schooner Eagle attempted to rescue Napoleon from his exile on the island of St. Helena in the south Atlantic. She said the mission was unsuccessful after someone tripped and discharged a musket.

Dr. James Mecray II owned four pharmacies in Cape May, one at Perry and Congress Place, one at the

southwest corner of Washington and Decatur streets, one at the north corner of Hughes and Ocean streets and another at the north corner of Ocean Street and Columbia Avenue.

In 1874, President Ulysses S. Grant needed a doctor while staying at Congress Hall and Dr. Mecray's office was just behind the hotel.

"The president in gratitude presented a silver bowl," Burger said.

The location of the bowl is unknown, she said.

Mayor Chuck Lear welcomed the Mecray family. He said he found accounts of Mecray family members who owned hotels, served with the New Jersey Volunteers during the Civil War, started a baseball team and were present for the change of the name of Cape Island to Cape May.

FISH MARKET

FRIDAY, MAY 19TH
thru SUNDAY, MAY 21ST

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