

Hunterdon Historical Record



**HUNTERDON
COUNTY
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**

hunterdonhistory.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

Click Save the Date
on our website for more details.

June 25, 2016 11 am - 1 pm
Steam Boat Splash 2-hour *History Tour of the Delaware River*
Board in Lambertville; \$25 for
members; \$30 non-members.

August 13 and 20, 10 am
Saturday History Day Camps
for kids grades 4-6

August 24-28
Hunterdon County
4-H & Agricultural Fair
See the Society's display in the
non-profit tent.

September 18 and 25, 1-5 pm
Hunterdon Heritage Days
The Doric House and all county
museums open for free tours.

September 24, 9 am to 4 pm
**3rd Annual Cemetery
Seminar**
Hunterdon Co. Library, Rt. 12
See page 1233

October 15, 9 am to 2 pm
5th Annual Book Sale
Archive Building
67 River Road, Flemington
New selection of old books

Society Library Hours
Open 12 - 4 pm every Thursday
And 10 - 4 pm these Saturdays:
June 11, 25
July 9, 23
August 13, 27
September 10, 24

John Blane, MD, A Singular Hunterdon Personality

By John Kuhl

Physician, teacher, ranking military officer, legislator, farmer, and more, Dr. John Blane did it all. He was one of the giants of Hunterdon County in his time. Recently our archivists found a very nice sixth-plate hand-tinted ferrotype showing a clean-shaven Blane in his New Jersey State Militia uniform. Its button pattern of threes indicates the rank of Major General, a rare rank then as there were never more than perhaps a half-dozen at a time in the state. The only other image of him evident has been a lithograph on page 224 in Snell's *History of Hunterdon* showing Blane with a full beard.

Also in our collection to remind us further of Blane is a nice tall case for his grandfather's clock that closely resembles those used by Flemington clock maker Joachim Hill. This came to us from the Hunterdon Medical Center, which had inherited it from Blane's family. Unfortunately, it had sustained water damage to the case and theft of its movement before we got it. Our trustees authorized repairs to the damaged wood. We do have the dial, and hope someday to put the clock back in running order if we can find and afford a suitable movement.

Medicine in Blane's day was a far different discipline. Dr. Hubert Schmidt highlights this in his *Old Times in Northwest Jersey*: "*In the days before the discovery of the true causes of disease, rule-of-thumb was often superior to medical theory. The country doctor or 'general practitioner' often learned more by experience than through books and medical journals. If he was a man who watched symptoms of disease and recovery with an observant eye, and if he had a retentive memory, he often became a doctor who seemingly by instinct, guided his patients to recovery.*" Such a healer was John Blane.



Gen. John Blane (1802-1885), c. 1860

Blane was born on 7 July 1802 in North Brunswick Township in Middlesex County, New Jersey, the only son of Thomas Blane and Elizabeth Toombs Blane. His father had an Irish background but both parents had closer and older ties to Scotland. Blane was educated in the local schools of Middlesex, receiving special instruction in surveying and deeding property. He dabbled also with celestial navigation and nearly went to sea as a second mate on a merchant ship. From 1820 through 1827, he learned medicine, both from local doctors and from varied medical entities in New York City while working in between, teaching school and pursuing his drafting to help pay his way. By 1827 he was certified to practice medicine, and seeking a more rural existence, he entered into a partnership with Dr. William Hunt in Hunterdon's Clarksville, which eventually combined with Sodom just to the north to become today's Glen Gardner.

continued on page 1236

HUNTERDON HISTORICAL RECORD

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LIBRARY HOURS

Thursday, Noon to 4 p.m.

2nd and 4th Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
and by appointment

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on the calendar year,
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Please send us your name, address, phone number, email address, and tell us if you would like to volunteer in the library, the archives, or the museum. Mail the information with your check to:

Hunterdon County Historical Society
ATTN: Membership
114 Main Street
Flemington, NJ 08822

Or join online with a credit card at:
www.hunterdonhistory.org/membership

Plan TODAY to Preserve Hunterdon's History

Leaving a gift to the Hunterdon County Historical Society in your will or trust, by beneficiary designation, or another form of planned gift can make a lasting difference in preserving Hunterdon's history. For more information please contact our Executive Director Patricia Millen at (908) 782-1091 or patricia.hchs@embarqmail.com.

Acquisitions

Artifacts and documents on the history of Hunterdon County and the families who resided here are welcome additions to the Society's Collections. Donations may not be available for research until they have been processed, a continuing activity. The Society thanks the donors for these recent acquisitions.

Armstrong, Janice: Two mid-nineteenth century bodices from the estate of Eda W. Fisher.

Drenkhahn, Edward: Three year-books (1944-1946, Flemington High Reading Echo) and the Diploma of Emma Alleger, 1946.

Jacobs, Tracee: 1910 Democratic Ticket ballot for the Township of Readington, 11/8/1910, including Woodrow Wilson for Governor.

Kiovisky, Doug: One Watercolor lithograph, "The Courthouse, Flemington, NJ, Late 1800's" by Dorian Gray, including certificate of authenticity, 1976.

New England Conservancy, c/o Archivist Maryalice Perrin-Mohr: One letter and two postcards from the Flemington Children's Choir School, ca. 1926.

RGA, Inc.: One Report; Historic American Engineering (HAER) Documentation, Stone Masonry Channel and Culvert System, Railroad Avenue – Main Street Stormwater Improvement Project, Borough of Califon, Hunterdon County, NJ (2016).

Stothoff, Richard: Eagle Scout Project Binder of Jeremy Mahr; Oral History of the Oak Grove Schoolhouse, 2015.

Witherell, Ellen: Two family bibles and two family photograph albums from the Hockenberry/Pegg/Shepherd (from the Harmony School Road area) families.



Eda Fisher bodice.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

By Mary Ellen Soldavin, Membership Chair

We extend a warm welcome to these new members who recently joined the Society, and thank those members who included a donation with their renewals. Your support is appreciated and does not go unnoticed.

Steve Balducci, Willingboro, NJ

Bernadette Harding, Ringoes, NJ

John Kuhlmann, Stockton, NJ

Stacey Rister, Alpha, NJ

Sally Jagoe, Stockton, NJ

Greg Lee, Pearl River, LA

Floyd Saums, Flemington, NJ

New Life Members: Henry Kuhl, Flemington, NJ

Elizabeth Rice, Milwaukee, WI

Research Requests by Mail or Phone

\$25 per query for two hours of research by our volunteers
using library and archival resources.

See website for forms and more information.

Salute to A Volunteer

LYNN SNODGRASS-PILA has been volunteering at the Hiram E. Deats Memorial Library for two years. Each time she leaves the building, she glances back at the stacks to see the growing number of green catalog labels on the spines of the books in the genealogy section. Thanks to her tireless work, three hundred books have been processed to date!

The Society's founder and namesake of our library, Hiram E. Deats, made major contributions to the field of local genealogy and was the principle author of 15 published works. Lynn has cataloged these books and many other family genealogies in the library's collection. Because of her contribution, this collection is now ready to go on-line as part of the Hunterdon County Online Collection Catalog funded by a grant from The Astle-Alpaugh Foundation in 2016.

Lynn retired from the Memorial Library of Nazareth in Pennsylvania where she served as executive director. A resident of Readington Township now, she travels extensively with her husband Caesar and is never without a good book to read.



Lynn Snodgrass-Pila

Library Volunteers Aid Researchers

Michael Gesner, the author of eight books on family genealogy, is a regular volunteer in our research library on the first and third Thursdays of the month. He focuses his deep genealogical research experience to assist new, and advanced, family researchers.

For beginners, Michael can demonstrate online search techniques and strategies useful for finding answers to ancestral questions. For more experienced genealogists, he can offer a second opinion, and since no two people think alike, a different approach to the quest can be a great resource.

Last year, Michael made a significant find for one of his wife Janet's "cousins". Elaine was a perfect 67/67 Mitochondrial DNA match with Janet; however, she was adopted. She had been searching for her birth parents for over half-a-century. With the clues she provided, Michael found her birth parents in *seven* minutes!

Since the library can be a busy place, there are additional Society volunteers who are knowledgeable and willing to assist members and visitors in their research. Bring in your family history. See if Michael, or one of the other volunteers, can help you.

Good things can happen when you reach out to others. Do stop in and visit.

President Charles Fisher Reports

THE ASTLE-ALPAUGH FAMILY FOUNDATION (TAAFF) of Annandale, NJ has awarded the Society a \$5,000 grant, and it is my pleasure to tell you about it.

The funds will purchase museum software and pay the salary of Chelsea Williams, who will work 200 hours to create an *Online Collection Catalog*, a 24/7 public-access searchable database of specific Society collections. Chelsea, who has a degree in anthropology from Kutztown University and graduate work in museum studies at Seton Hall University, will prepare photograph, manuscript, and decorative art collection records to post to the new website portal over the summer.

Besides expressing our appreciation to the Foundation for the grant, I want to recognize Patricia Millen, our Executive Director, who prepared the winning application.

TAAFF is a private grant-making organization with a mission to improve the lives of individuals and families through funding for local communities and diverse educational programs. The Foundation has been a generous supporter of the Society for the past few years. To learn more about it, visit: www.taaff.org.

A BIG VOTE OF THANKS TO BETH RICE is due for all her graphic design work for the last several years. Beth, a former Trustee, and now our newest Life Member, helped re-structure the newsletter, our logo, and letterhead, and started the reorganization of our computer lists. She has relocated to Wisconsin and is sorely missed.



Beth Rice

THE NEWSLETTER has a new name in a new font, which you probably noticed. Please let us know if there are other updates or features you would like to see or read about in the newsletter.

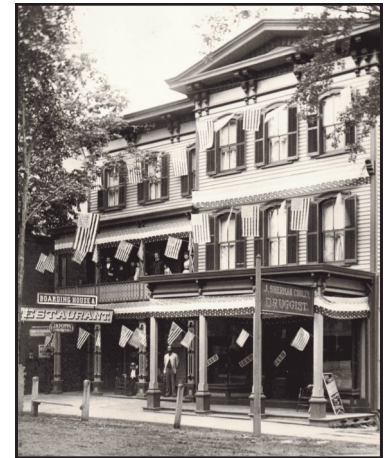
Cemetery Seminar is September 24

The Third Annual Cemetery Seminar is set for Saturday, September 24 at the Hunterdon County Library, Route 12, 9 am to 4 pm. The program is *Rest in Peace? Not in NJ! Preserving and Protecting American Heroes' Graves—A Revolutionary Idea!*

The morning discussion will cover the lack of legal protections in New Jersey for graveyards or graves; the afternoon session will seek to develop ideas to promote legislative action. A \$10 fee covers morning and afternoon sessions, snacks, and lunch. Attend either session, or stay for both. Reservations required. Make checks payable to HCHS and mail to 114 Main Street Flemington, NJ 08822.

The seminar is a joint venture of the Mt. Amwell Project, the Historical Society's Cemetery Committee, and the 300th Committee.

Photography Exhibition Features Flemington's Historic Main Street



A charming look back at old Flemington.

Two dozen photographs of Flemington's historic Main Street buildings, taken from 1889 to 1905, go on display with some Flemington artifacts in the Doric House upstairs gallery May 21 through winter, 2017.

Most of the photographs came to the Society in 1997 from Betsy Schenk Trapp of Bay Head, NJ, a gift from the estate of her father, John F. Schenk (1905-1988). They show the shops, churches, and houses of early days, as well as the people and their clothes, horses and carriages.

The Man Behind the Pictures

Born into a family deeply rooted in New Jersey history, Mr. Schenk graduated from Flemington High School, Canterbury School of New Milford, CT, and Princeton University.

He was one of two Hunterdon delegates to the 1947

Convention that produced the NJ Constitution. His great-great-great grandfather, Jacob Hardenbergh, was a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1776, and another ancestor, Ferdinand Schenk, served on the Constitutional Convention of 1844.

A life member and Trustee of the Society, Mr. Schenk served two terms as Mayor of Flemington, chaired the USO in the 1940s, was president of the Foran Foundry and Manufacturing Company in its final days, and was a director of the former Hunterdon County National Bank.

Gallery Hours

The gallery, which opened in December of 2014, was made possible in part by funds from The Astle-Alpaugh Family Foundation. The exhibition will be open during Library hours and for special events and programs.

RESOLUTION Passed by Board of Trustees in March 9, 2016 Meeting

If you are concerned about the destruction of the Historic District, write a letter to the Flemington Borough Council, 38 Park Avenue, Flemington, NJ 08822

Whereas the purpose of the 131-year-old Hunterdon County Historical Society is to identify, preserve, and protect the historic fabric of Hunterdon County for the enjoyment of all;

Whereas we, the Board of Trustees of the Hunterdon County Historical Society, are not opposed to the redevelopment of Flemington and, indeed, congratulate the developer for taking on the much needed project; and

Whereas we are much concerned that the plan, as presented, decimates the heart of the National Register Historic District created in 1980 because of the architecture, age, and history of the buildings, and replaces it with 21st century designs, ignoring the charm of historical architecture – like that left in place in Lambertville and countless nationwide historic districts, which have proved to be tourist magnets; now therefore be it

Resolved, that the Board of Trustees of the Hunterdon County Historical Society:

1. respectfully requests that the Developer seriously consider any alternate plans that will save the historical buildings and will provide the same square footage needed to balance cost and recovery;
2. urges the Flemington Borough's Council, Historic Preservation Commission, and Planning Board to reconsider the heritage tourism appeal of an authentic historical experience;
3. asks the Hunterdon County Freeholders to honor the points made in its Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy to improve heritage tourism in the county; and
4. reminds everyone that *History Sells* and urges their help in saving the proven charm of historic Flemington.

Flemington's Historic Main Street Threatened by Development

The heart of Flemington's National Register Historic District would be leveled and replaced with six-story buildings better suited to Newark or New Brunswick in a proposed development by local businessman Jack Cust. The suggested name of the new development is The Stagecoach at Flemington.

The mid-19th and early 20th century buildings from the Union Hotel to Chorister Place and from Main to Spring Streets would be razed. Their replacements would include a 100-room hotel and a two- or four-year college. Flemington Fur would anchor retail shops and restaurants on the first level. Upper levels would house 230 to 250 high quality residential units. Underground and deck parking would accommodate 900 cars.

Trustees of the Society passed a resolution that was

widely disseminated. It states that while we are not opposed to the revitalization of Flemington, and in fact welcome it, we are opposed to the wholesale destruction of the historical Main Street architecture that makes Flemington unique.

The National Register of Historic Places says this: Flemington's architecture ranks high among [New Jersey's] architectural attractions....[it] represents most of the major developments in 19th Century American architecture....[it is] significant to the region because it is the County seat....and its buildings reflect the aspirations of the people who inhabit it.

We can only hope efforts by many groups to preserve the long-time charm of Main Street will prevail with a new, more human-scale, and historically authentic plan.

Top: Streetscape today: 1877-78 Second Empire style Union Hotel; and three Italianate buildings dated c. 1880, mid- to late-19th century; and a last quarter 19th century "sister" to Ford's Theater in Washington, DC. Below: Same view, proposed new look.



GEN. JOHN BLANE, *cont. from front page...*

Confident in his growing medical abilities and finding rural Hunterdon to his liking, he hung out his own shingle in April of 1831 at Perryville along the then twenty-five year old New Jersey Turnpike (today's I-78) that ran between New Brunswick and Easton, Pennsylvania. Here, he pursued his practice for forty years. It was said that he never refused a call he could possibly attend, riding over most of Hunterdon, up into Warren and Sussex counties, and even across the Delaware to eastern Pennsylvania. He was a rugged man and seemed unfazed by the difficult travel, the long hours, the regular diet, and lack of sleep. In 1837, he purchased the 111-acre farm on which now sits The Farmhouse restaurant, formerly the Grand Colonial and before that, the new Coach and Paddock. Today's website of the Farmhouse states that the house on the property was built in 1685 by Dr. John Blane. There is no credible record of European settlement there until after 1700. Blane himself, was not born until 1802 and did not buy the farm until 1837 (Hunterdon deed 67-249). This deed's consideration indicates substantial improvements already on the property when he bought it. It would seem their claim needs review. Another local legend may not be one touted by the folks at the restaurant. Study of cadavers has long been essential to the furtherance of medical knowledge. Blane taught medicine as well as practiced it.

The local story is that once the cadavers had served Blane's educational purposes here, the remains were then interred in unmarked graves in front of the property. To help locate the property, this area in 1708 was originally Amwell Township of Burlington County and then Hunterdon from 1714. In 1730 the area became Bethlehem Township and then Union Township in 1853 when it was split off over a reported difference of opinion over school matters in which Blane was certainly involved.

Always a staunch Jacksonian Democrat, Blane held strong political opinions and worked his way capably and steadily upwards, starting in township school positions. He was a state assemblyman in 1835 and 1836, and later served on the Board of Hunterdon Freeholders, being the Board's Director in 1850. During the Civil War he was elected a state senator. In all his offices he had a reputation as an honest and sincere representative who firmly upheld his convictions. Locals trusted him with more than their health. Legend has it that as he made his medical rounds, for the convenience of his patrons he would accept their bank deposit money for transfer to town banks. Some said that as a noted collector of exotic plants, he would sometimes temporarily bury that money in his garden for safekeeping under a specific tree designated for each individual until he could get to the bank.

Though medicine remained always his dominant concern, he had always been intensely interested in military

matters and for over 50 years held commissions in the state's militia. As required by state law, he had joined the home Middlesex militia when he came of age in 1820. His rise was meteoric. By June of 1829 he appears on the rolls of the Second Hunterdon militia regiment as its surgeon. Just five years later, he was signing papers as Colonel of the First Independent Regiment of Field Artillery of the First Hunterdon Brigade. By 1838 he was a Brigadier General commanding the entire Hunterdon Brigade. And by February of 1840 he had been promoted to Major General of the state's Fourth Division in command of the brigades of the several northwestern counties.

In 1868 at the age of 66 Blane turned over the everyday operation of his practice to his son-in-law, Dr. Nathan Boileau. But until his death, his statewide reputation as a doctor brought continued requests for consultation on difficult cases. In relative retirement he was able to spend more time on his writings, including a history of the Hunterdon District Medical Society, an organization in which he had held every office over the years. This history contains bios of many early local doctors but characteristically, not his own. And he continued to direct and improve the cultivation of his farm.

His life in his final years could not have been pleasant. No newspaper seen stated his cause of death but on his death certificate is the fact that he died just shy of age 83 on 18 June 1885 of cancer of the nose and face after battling two years with that affliction. The well attended funeral was held at his Perryville home with burial following in the nearby cemetery of the Bethlehem Presbyterian Church at Grandin. He had married Cornelia Smith in 1840. The couple had lost an infant son, John Octavus, but he was survived by his wife and two daughters, Nancy, the wife of Dr. Nathan Boileau, and Mary, the wife of Dr. Nathan Case. Blane had lived a remarkably diverse life and left many legacies, perhaps the most important being a whole generation of excellent area doctors who had been directly taught and influenced by him.

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FROM THE DESK OF DONALD CORNELIUS, HCHS MANUSCRIPT CURATOR

Faithful followers of the HCHS may recall that our feature article in the spring 2015 newsletter described a collection of twelve scrapbooks created by Elizabeth Van Fleet Vosseller. These scrapbooks had been re-discovered in the bottom of a desk drawer in the Vosseller Room of the Doric House museum. Upon examination, it was discovered that the scrapbooks are a compelling chronicle of the Admiral Byrd Expedition to Antarctica in 1928-1929.

Many people know that Elizabeth Van Fleet Vosseller ("Miss Bessie") was locally and nationally famous for her work in the formation of the Flemington Children's Choir School and for her contribution to the development of Children's Choirs everywhere. Under her tutelage the Flemington Children's Choir School was used as a model for others to follow and admire. What is not so well known was that Mrs. Vosseller suffered a debilitating stroke later in her life, in 1928. She was bed-ridden from the stroke and could no longer participate in the daily running of her school. She decided to create scrapbooks that documented events of her day to pass the time.

And what better subject could there have been for her to document than a great saga of the early twentieth century? As difficult as it is to imagine for us today in our age of sophisticated information delivery, the Byrd Expedition of 1928 to Antarctica was a source of great drama and entertainment. Americans of the time could – and did – follow the expedition through daily newspaper reports and limited radio broadcasts. In a way, this expedition was analogous to a hit TV series or a reality show of today. The expedition turned Admiral Byrd into a national hero, his crew into well-known personalities, and his exploits became the stuff of legends.

Mrs. Vosseller was not content to simply follow the expedition through the newspapers. She corresponded with almost all of the members of the adventure, and received many letters of interest, keepsakes, autographs, and photographs from them in return. She weaved these personal documents along with news clippings and text into a story that is told in a unique format. She follows the expedition from its setting forth to its return, continues the story with the great receptions held in major cities of the United States to welcome the hero home, and even

takes the time to explore the personalities of the various crew members.

Over the past year, we removed the pages from the old scrapbook covers and gently removed the photographs and clippings from acidic and damaged mounts. After this, we placed the documents into protective sleeves. These in turn were placed in specialty Gaylord acid-free scrapbook ring binder boxes. For added access and security, we digitally scanned the entire set of volumes. The HCHS still intends to create a gallery exhibit and to develop programming featuring this collection. Meanwhile,

we are pleased to inform our members and friends that since these scrapbooks have been arranged and preserved, they may also be examined. The HCHS would like to extend special thanks to our cool Archival Volunteer Jenn Morgan for her labor on these scrapbooks.

While we are speaking of Mrs. Vosseller, we would be remiss not to also mention that another one of the collections recently re-leased was created by her as well. After discovery

of another batch of papers from Mrs. Vosseller in the archival holdings, we have processed them into our newest collection release: Collection No. 148, the Elizabeth Van Fleet Vosseller Papers II.

This collection consists of correspondence to Elizabeth Vosseller between the years of 1919 through 1940. The majority of the correspondence is in regards to her work with the Flemington Children's Choir School or as her ongoing work as an author. The collection is important to those researching Mrs. Vosseller's background as an author or historical information on religious choir direction during the 1930s. HCHS extends special thanks to Kristen Self, one of our awesome archival volunteers, for processing this collection.

And lest our readers come to believe we only process material from the Vosseller family, we should also point out the release of Collection No. 171, correspondence of Mahlon Fisher, and Collection No. 147, The Bertha Schuck Papers. Both of those collections were released in the first part of this year. I am personally very grateful for our truly wonderful volunteer staff. They work very hard to help our Society preserve the documentary heritage of Hunterdon County.



Members of the Admiral Byrd Expedition aboard the SS New York.

Spotlight on Collections: Lownes Helmet Creamer

This beautiful silver creamer traveled many miles from Hunterdon County and back again! The creamer originally belonged to Esther Lowery (born 1777), the 11th child of Thomas and Esther Lowery of Milford. Thomas was a merchant and landowner in Hunterdon County who bought a large parcel of land in the Frenchtown/Milford area in 1805. The Lowery's second home is today the Chestnut Hill B&B in Milford. Colonel Thomas Lowery and his wife Esther were supporters of the American Revolution helping to raise funds to buy military supplies and medicines for Washington's army.

The creamer is almost 7 inches tall and 5½ inches from lip to handle. "Lownes" is stamped in the corner on the bottom along with its hallmark. The creamer does appear to be partly gold in the photo but that is due to the reflection of the indoor lighting.

The initials on the front of the cup are *MR* with a date of Dec. 3, 1797. The initials on the front of the stand are *MEG* and the date is April 4th, 1901. It is unclear who *MR* might be but *MEG* stands for Mary E. Goodrich who married in 1901. The creamer was given to her by her mother as a wedding present. Her mother was Frances McGill Goodrich a member of



the DAR whose ancestor was Col. Thomas Lowery.

The creamer was passed on in the Goodrich family until 1951 when it was sold by Esther's great-great granddaughter to a fellow DAR member. The creamer found its way to North Carolina over the years. The purchaser's granddaughter did some research looking to return it to its home. She first contacted the Milford Borough Historical Society who put her in contact with Hunterdon County Historical Society. Thanks to this lady's interest in history and genealogy the creamer is home again!

If YOU CAN volunteer to landscape and tend the Doric House garden, be a research library assistant, or provide accounting services for the Society, please talk to Executive Director Pat Millen, 908.782.1091.

Hunterdon County
Historical Society
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Flemington, NJ
08822

