

Hunterdon Historical Record



HUNTERDON
COUNTY
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

hunterdonhistory.org

Farewell to Pat Millen

It is with great sadness that we acknowledge the retirement of our Executive Director, Patricia Millen. Pat has done an extraordinary job in advancing the mission of our Society since joining us in January, 2015. In her own words, she is retiring "to pursue with greater attention, the most favorite position that I have ever held: grandmother." We wish Pat, her three grandchildren, and other loved ones much happiness. We hope to have her continued help on a reduced schedule to ease the transition to another director.

SAVE THE DATE

Sat., Oct. 26 for
the Cemetery Committee's 6th Annual
"Meet & Greet"

Time and place TBD.

Check our website
www.hunterdonhistory.org
in early Oct. for details.

Women's History is Fall Meeting Focus

Celebrate women's history and the coming centennial marking a woman's right to vote at the Society's annual fall meeting and lecture, November 10 at 2:00 pm in the Flemington Presbyterian Church, 10 East Main Street. Andrea Tingey, Historic Preservation Specialist with the New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office, will present a pictorial journey through the *New Jersey Women's Heritage Trail*.

Ms. Tingey's lecture will explore and bring to life the Heritage Trail, which defines many of the contributions made by notable women in New Jersey to history, science, agriculture, labor, religion, sports, and business and the tangible legacies they left behind. This rich history was first published by the New Jersey Office of Historic Preservation in 2004.

A preservation specialist for 26 years, Ms. Tingey is involved in the review of National Register nominations and coordinated the establishment and publishing of New Jersey's first statewide guidelines for architectural survey activities. She taught the *Introduction to Historic Preservation* course at Drew University and *American Architectural History* at Rutgers-Camden. Ms. Tingey received a BA in history from Dickinson College and did her graduate work in historic preservation planning at Cornell University.

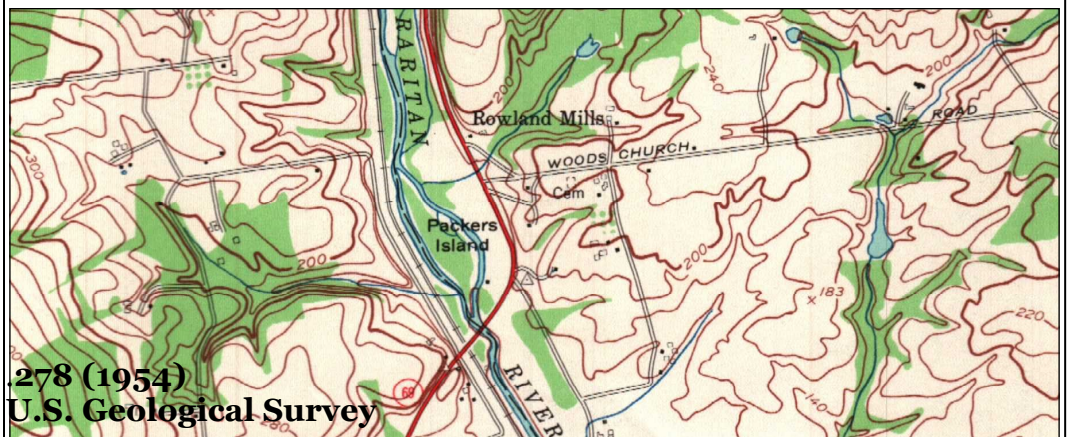
The illustrated lecture covering the women's heritage trail and upcoming events planned for the women's right to vote centennial in 2020 will last about 45 minutes, followed by questions. Refreshments will be served.



Andrea Tingey, fall meeting speaker.

Ready for a Picnic? Follow Me to Pages 1314-15

John Kuhl reports on the glory days of Packers Island, which faded in the 1890s. Note the small, black square by the river at the island's southern end— and read the story to see what it was.



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www.hunterdonhistory.org/membership**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, Donald G. *New Jersey Pioneers: twenty-four families with New Jersey immigrants, 1676-1705, their New England immigrant ancestors, 1630-1662, and Ohio descendants, 1803-1822.* HCHS Purchase.

Balik, Cindy. 12 postcards from John P. Case and Sons, Clover Hill, Hunterdon County, ca. 1910-1918.

Chan, Kathy. Photographic images of the Sedlock and other families from Lambertville and Sergeantsville, n.d. (see below)



Above: Ed and Mary Sedlock Farm, Harvest Time, 1935.

Below: Horvath Place, Horvath and Sedlock families, Sergeantsville, n.d.

Donhauser, Russell. A collection of genealogical materials including books, Cemetery records, bible records, NJ Archives Series publications, records of Hopewell, NJ, and family genealogical notebooks concerning the Van Liew, Hart, and other families.



Flemington Public Library. Records of the Flemington League of Women's Voters, including issue files, 1954-1957.

Jaeger, Debra. Flemington High School Echo yearbooks, 1947, 1948, 1949.

Kuhl, John W. *Stars over New Jersey: New Jersey's generals and admirals of the Civil War Era.* Gift of the author.

Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society. A scrapbook of clippings and announcements posted into a business ledger (Day Book) from a Flemington business, 1829. The Day Book is unidentified but has many clear pages of entries.

Ogren, Thomas. 2 booklets from the Sourland Conservancy: *The Story of Goat Hill: from the Revolutionary War to the fight to save it* (Rev. ed.); *Marching through the Sourlands: the American Army's route to the Battle of Monmouth.*

Paulus, Sokolowski, and Sartor, c/o Emily Cooperman. Documentation package for Project 058000-0001, Flemington Borough, Hunterdon County, Sale of 90-96 Main Street and adjacent

Acquisitions continued

parking lots, HABS Level III review, 2019.

Pearson, Pamela S. and F. Edward Wright. *Colonial Families of New Jersey*, Volumes 1-3. Abstracts of Hunterdon, Middlesex and Somerset County Records. HCHS Purchase.

Schaut, Alvin. Postcard from Stangl pottery, Flemington, ca. 1960.

Schoff, Robert (Estate). 2 notebooks of news clippings and notes concerning Hunterdon men in the Vietnam War, including high-lights of the lives of men killed in action. n.d.

Sisser, Fred III. A major collection of announcements clipped by hand from Hunterdon County Newspapers, ca. 1830-present, arranged alphabetically. Includes announcements of marriage, birth, death, baptism, reunions, anniversaries, and other events.

Stevens, Stephanie. Records of Ryman Herr, Superintendent of Readington Township Board of Education, 1955-1958.

Stewart, Lois. Flemington High School memorabilia including photographs of the Class of 1949, programs, reunions, and playbills. (See below)



Flemington High School, Class of 1949

Trenton Free Public Library (Trentonian Collection). A bound periodical, *The Towpath*, Vol. 2, Jan. - Dec. 1941.

Welcome, New Members

Paul Bailey, Zionsville, IN
 Lana Coutros, Flemington, NJ
 Jessie Dalrymple, Alexandria, VA
 Susan Gilbert-Hagood, Upland, CA
 Marilyn Kromrey, San Jose, CA
 Kay Larsen, Easton, PA
 Brian Murphy, Ringoes, NJ
 David Overaker, Glen Gardner, NJ
 William Storz, Alexandria, VA
 Janet Thompson, Norfolk, VA

Research Requests by Mail or Phone

\$25 per query for two hours of research by our volunteers using library and archival resources. For forms and more info: hunterdonhistory.org.

Early Settlers

Johann Balthazar Pickel

Johann Balthazar Pickel (Pickell) was born September 2, 1687 in Bad Durkheim in the Palatine region of Germany. His father died young, leaving his widow, Anna Maria Mullier Pickel, with dependent children.

Baltus spent his childhood in this village in an area overrun by French, Spanish, and various Germanic princes who pillaged the population for some 30 years, until the people could endure no more. When Baltus was 17, England's Queen Anne offered to relocate the "poor" Palatines to the New World. In 1709/10, thousands of Germans made their way down the Rhine River seeking the promise of peace and prosperity. Baltus, his mother, and stepfather, Mathias Reinbold, whom his mother married in 1704, were in the first large wave of Palatines to migrate to this country.

The family settled on the "Raritons" [sic] with many German Lutheran friends and were a part of the first German Lutheran religious service ever celebrated in New Jersey on August 1, 1714. Rev. Justus Falckner rode out from New York to lead the worship. When Falckner could not come, Baltus Pickel served as lay reader.

On August 16, 1718, Baltus married Anna Gertrud Reiter. He settled his family with at least two living children at the base of the Cushetunk Mountains where he built a large stone house that stood until 1914. The mountain became known as Pickel's Mountain. Until the Lutherans built a church, services were held in the Pickel home, indicating the religious status of the family.

In 1730, when the congregation built the first German Lutheran Church in New Jersey on land on Potterstown Road donated by Aray Van-Guinee, a wealthy free black man, the structure was built by Baltus Pickel with his own money and labor. In 1750, the congregation moved to a large church in New Germantown (now Oldwick). Baltus, then one of the wealthiest farmers in the area, contributed large sums and much effort to the construction of the new church. He also donated 25 pounds for the purchase of an organ.

Baltus Pickel died December 5, 1765 at age 78 and is buried in the graveyard of the church in New Germantown that he faithfully served his whole life. He left the church 1,000 pounds—an enormous sum then—for its continued support.

His descendants still live on lands he owned in Readington and his legacy lives in Pickel's Mountain, Pickell Park in Whitehouse Station, and in his beloved Lutheran Church.

Text adapted from an earlier article by Stephanie Stevens for the *Readington News*, a monthly newsletter.

Packer's Island: Long-Ago Favorite for Picnicking

By John W. Kuhl

Several recent research inquiries have concerned the history of an old-time, five-acre recreation area on an island in the South Branch of the Raritan River just north of Flemington where State Highway 31 crosses both the river and the old Lehigh Valley (now Norfolk & Southern) Railroad.

Before the internet, before TV, and even before the household radio, folks found pleasure in a simple fashion and with much less fuss and expense than today. Travel was both inconvenient and expensive. People pretty much lived, worked, and relaxed near home. Each town had its own picnic grove. Being next to a creek or stream was a plus. People today would no doubt find little to excite them in these rudimentary parks, but in my memory, attending our Sunday school picnics in just such places was a big thing to us in the 1930s and 1940s, partly because it was the most we could expect.

Siting the island as to township was no simple matter since it lies between two channels of the river that forms the boundary between the two townships involved. I started out thinking the island had to be in Readington Township but after visiting county and municipal tax offices that took unhelpful, *opposite* sides on the question, I ended up at the county G.I.S. office at the Route 12 complex where mapping expert Patty Leidner set me straight.

While it appears on the map that the island should be in Readington Township, the boundary line there takes a zig and follows the eastern channel around the island, in effect setting off the whole island to Raritan Township. Tax maps had not been too helpful since the land is now all publicly owned with no revenue in question. The island just appears on maps as part of a far larger, neutral conservation area up and down the river. On this subject was a letter to the *Democrat* editor in 1955 by local farm owner Hervey Haver. "This island seems to be a No Man's Land at present. When State Highway 30, now 69 was surveyed in 1927, the State surveyors could find no deed to cover ownership of Packer's Island, although it was considered property of the LVRR. The State's conclusion was that many years ago the whole island considered had been part of the three farms on the east side in Readington Township but that the river course had changed, cutting off the now existing island."

While I have spent all of my 85 years as a resident of the county, I confess to never having set foot on the island, but that now seemed a must. So, accompanied by my trusty brown Lab companion, Copper, we set out to explore.

It was late February and what we found was mud, transverse washouts, and walls of multiflora rose. It was not a walk for sissies. We started in Readington Township on the eastern side at the nearly hidden little highway pull-off, almost under the highway bridge over the river and the railroad. We slogged north through the mud and multiflora to a point almost even with the traffic light on Route 31 at West Woods Church Road. In that span we found no sign of any building that had once supposedly served beverages stronger than beer to the island's patrons across the river after the railroad banned liquor on the island itself. Russell Kline remembers as a kid, until his father grounded him, raising pocket money by wading the river to carry the contraband across to eager customers on the island side.

Copper and I then returned to our car and traveled up and over the highway bridge to the island's other side on River Road. Again, no trace of any structure, not even the reported railroad shelter that once stood along the tracks. We could see what looked like remnants of grading where horse-drawn wagons could have forded the west leg of the river to reach the island. But where were all those elusive buildings?

The answer was found in the Society's inventory of old newspapers that included vivid reminiscences on the island by area old-timers like Russell Kline, Emory Dalley, and Hervey Haver. The 27 August 1878 issue of the *Hunterdon County Democrat* starts our story: "We understand that the Easton & Amboy Railroad have an eye upon the island known as "Pic Nic Island" two-and-a-half miles east [actually north] of this place, on the Branch near Rowland's Mills, with a view of purchasing and fitting up the same for the use of excursions. It could be made a very attractive place for this purpose."

It took a while but this was followed up four years later in their 11 July 1882 issue: "PICNIC ISLAND", a rather picturesque spot along the Branch within two- and-a-half miles of Flemington, is known to most of our readers hereabouts. The island has lately been greatly improved by cutting out the underbrush and dead trees, and a foot bridge has this Summer been placed over the stream [the western branch near the upper part of the island] leading to it. Since the establishment of the Easton & Amboy R.R. [in 1874, and a.k.a. the Lehigh Valley R.R.] which runs by it, many picnics have been held on this beautiful island, which is known as "Packer Island" [after the railroad's president, Asa Packer], the excursionists coming from Allentown, Easton, and Phillipsburg...It is reported that a platform is soon to

be built for dancing, and there is also some talk of erecting a hotel thereon, by the Railroad Company.” The name morphed over the years to Packer’s Island.

That hotel never came off but improvements were gradually added, the dancing platform and a pavilion to start. The river remained ever a threat and the pavilion was anchored by cables to four large beech trees. A hand pump from an artesian well supplied drinking water. Mr. Haver, who owned land nearby, remembers there was a small merry-go-round operated by a man in the center using a long handled crank. Music was provided by a small hand organ powered five minutes at a time by a local boy who would receive a free ticket for the next ride. Once the island was improved, a lush green sod grew under tall shade trees. One feature was a set of wooden swings built so tall and heavy as to present a danger to some, as in fact, it did when the heavy seats fell on unsuspecting guests.

Beer, but no hard liquor, and all sorts of picnic food were standard fare. Clambakes were especially popular, many of them catered by Three Bridges storekeeper William R. Love. Some were huge successes, others not, but apparently the net effect was enough to continue.

Trains from both east and west as well as wagon loads from closer points, would bring in the patrons. Attendance on a good day could soar to three thousand. This was big time! Whenever it looked showery, there was a scramble by patrons to gather their families before the river rose and to escape the island either by the foot bridge or the ford alongside it.

In the end, the river’s threat to permanent development proved insurmountable. In a flood of 1885, water rose to three feet over the pavilion floor and only the tether to the beech trees kept it in place. My childhood memories of ice jams on the Branch were reinforced by other 1885 newspaper reports of ice piled up as high as the buildings on the island. Could the abrading effect of that ice have been the death knell of those buildings? Apparently not, because all the activities continued, peaking in the later 1880s and gradually tapering off into the 1890s as other newer sites elsewhere proved more irresistible to patrons.

Three Bridges stone mason and entrepreneur William Griffith would gain a sort of uncertain acclaim. He had for years catered at circuses and events all over the area, and in 1937 was featured on ABC radio in New York City as the long-ago inventor of pink lemonade. Serendipity struck, allegedly when a circus fat lady’s red bloomers blew off a laundry line into a vat of lemonade he was concocting, turning it pink. Ever the practical man he sold it anyway and it became a sensation. Or so the story goes.

Perhaps the biggest annual event on the island was the Farmers’ Picnic. Sporadic weather threats and its ever-growing display of farm implements finally exceeded the island’s space and the event was moved to the nearby Flemington Fairgrounds site of 1856, which thereafter became the steady venue of that event. In fact, this picnic revived the up-to-then foundering Flemington Fair, evolving into its continuation to this day, albeit on new grounds southwest of Ringoes since 2004.

What seems to be the island’s obituary is cited in a 19 March 1901 *Democrat*: “The old buildings on Packer Island are to be removed. Levi Cole of Stanton is the purchaser. This probably means the discontinuance of the Island as a picnic resort...” It thereafter gradually faded from the public consciousness and was finally and totally outclassed anyway by the opening of Bellewood Park at Pattenburg in 1904. In touting the elevation of this new park, the *Democrat* of 21 June 1904 stated “Annual Spring freshets, which caused the fall of Packer’s Island, cannot be the ruination of Bellewood Park.”

The reason so few physical traces remain finally appears in the late Frank A. Curcio’s as yet unpublished manuscript, *Ribbons Of History*. In a proof copy I have, Frank discussed the history of a state highway from Butzville south through Hunterdon. Opening in 1928 as Route 30, it was redesignated Route 69 in 1953. When its route markers with that suggestive number proved too popular to keep in place, the number was changed to today’s Route 31. Frank noted that: “Grading for the overpass bridge (the largest on the route) eliminated the popular Packer’s Island picnic grounds. The river channel was widened and the soil that made up much of the island was used as fill for the approaches to the span. The grading to construct the overpass still shows an elevation discrepancy with the land on either side.”

The dualization of Route 31 beginning in 1988 certainly furthered the obliteration of the old site. So, herein lies as much as will likely ever be told, of the story from birth to death, of Packer’s Island. It remains today as a conservation area accessible to only the most hardy and used only in more unofficial and diverse ways, which we leave to your imagination.

Sources:

1. Unpublished manuscript *Ribbons of History* by Frank A. Curcio (1942-2015) of Annandale, NJ
2. Hunterdon County Tax maps
3. Fifty-plus clippings from the *Hunterdon County Democrat*. For index see Kuhl Clipping Index at Hunterdon County Historical Society

THE SOCIETY GOES TO THE FAIR



Carnival rides, farm animals, ice cream—and the Society at the Hunterdon County 4-H and Agricultural Fair. Center photo shows Society Trustees John Kuhl (right) and John Allen setting up the Society's booth.

Our society booth at the 16th annual 4-H Fair in August prompts this brief visit to the history of our county fairs. The Flemington Fair could brag of being the state's oldest and nation's second oldest continuously operated fair. It had risen out of several prior agricultural expositions, but officially certified itself with formal organization in 1856. It featured farm and home product displays, of course, but its attendance was early on sparked by horse racing and from 1910 on, also by its motorcycle and auto contests.

In 1856 a group of local citizens cobbled together several pieces of land from Raritan Township farmers. It was a struggle. *The Hunterdon Democrat* of 25 August 1938 reveals that, "Bad weather, faulty management and the disappearance of the last treasurer with all the receipts, led to the final petering out of the old Fair in approximately 1890". The grounds itself survived by serving as a race horse training center under several succeeding owners. The agricultural exhibition portion switched its venue to the nearby Packer's Island picnic grounds in 1882. It proved tremendously popular for a few years but ultimately its five-acre layout yielded to insufficient space and the periodic assaults of roaring river floods and abrasive ice jams. By 1901, the annual Farmers' Picnic, the impetus of the exhibition fair, gave up and moved back to the old fairgrounds. This move proved to be the savior of the old site. By 1910, a group of local horsemen formed new management that brought needed stability to the privately-owned grounds.

True, there were some interruptions over the years; in 1862 by the Civil War army camp nearby, in 1918 by WWI, and in 1942 and 1943 by the need to conserve fuel and rubber for the WWII effort. But these were legitimate and did not impact on the claim of continuity. We elders well remember long years of successful fairs heralded by their trumpeted motto, "Bigger and Better than ever".

The search for increased revenue to cover annual costs resulted in the 1955 introduction of weekly stock car races. The original half-mile horse track was reconfigured into 5/8 of a mile to become the fastest dirt track in the nation. Eventually, the track was paved to quiet complaints of dirt and dust. The paved track proved less popular and the racing gradually lost its luster in the 1990s. Accumulating losses to the ground's owners led to rumors that the fairgrounds were to be sold.

The Flemington Fair as we oldsters knew it finally dissolved in 1999. Some racing continued until 2002. If you visit today's Lowe's you are on the site of the old raceway. A new committee including Roger Everitt formed to continue the ag portion of the fair in 2000. The old fair management offered their grounds for the first four years to the new Hunterdon County 4-H Agricultural Fair. By 2004, the County had purchased 42 acres in the old drive-in movie area just southwest of Ringoes, and from that year until this, the fair has opened there. Fifty acres were added in 2005. Continuous improvements bode well for the future. If you have never visited, put it on your next year's calendar.

Curator Cornelius is Asked: What Do You Do?

What is an Archivist? And what does one do?

Lately, I have been asked by many people in my social life, and even within the context of my duties within the Society, the nature of my job. I love my job, but I dread the question, "What do you do?"

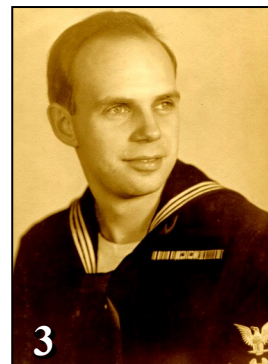
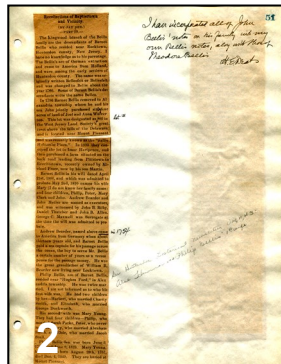
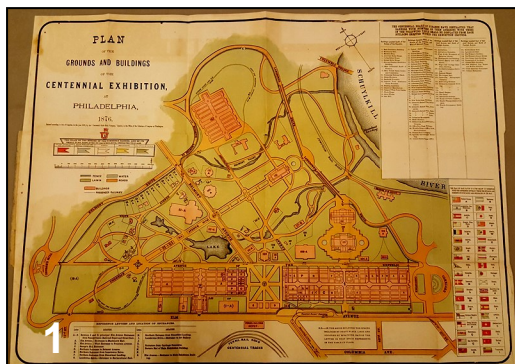
We are all asked this question from time to time. For most people, the answer is simple and easily understood: doctor, lawyer, barber, or landscaper. People expect simple job titles that are understandable and relatable. Imagine, then, the looks I get when I answer, "Archivist".

Crickets. Raised Eyebrows. The puzzled frowns of people who think they ought to know what it is, but aren't quite sure. Or, "Oh, you design buildings?" No. "You collect dinosaur bones?" No. "You dig for buried treasure?" Um, no. My polite answer to most people who ask this question is to suggest they think of me as a

about our job, our archive, our collections, and invite people to use them.

And my job is enjoyable! I am particularly interested in the first part of the process, appraisal and selection.

On a recent work night in the archives, while my volunteer staff was busy arranging and preserving records, I was evaluating new material for possible inclusion in our Society's archives. Step 1 is to remember that if you decide to include it, you are making a commitment to preserve it forever. Step 2 is to compare it to our Society's mission (summed up as to collect, preserve, and share materials that interpret the history of Hunterdon County specifically and New Jersey generally). The next steps in the process are complicated and would probably bore most people, so I will skip



specialized librarian who works with really old papers and books. That usually gets the "Oh, OK!" response as my work slides into something more easily relatable and understandable. My flip answer is to remind people of the movie *National Treasure*. (Without the guns, movie stars, or treasure part, of course.)

Some people, however, have an idea about what an archivist is, and pursue the issue. They know that I work with old papers and books, but exactly what do I do with them? Well, since you asked...

An archivist has several main job functions. First, we appraise and select records for preservation in an archive. That means we evaluate the things that are offered to us and decide what to keep and what to reject. Then, we arrange and preserve the things we decide to keep. That means we put the retained records into an order that people can use, and put them in special acid-free storage containers to make them last as close to forever as possible. Next, we describe and catalog the things we just arranged and preserved. That means we write an index, a guide, or an online access tool that makes it easy to use all these records. And then, we provide reference to all of this material in the archives. We open our repositories to the public, help people use these records, and answer questions about them. Finally, we provide outreach to the community—that is, we talk

right to the good stuff.

Let's have some fun with this: Here are four things I evaluated that evening.

1. A Map, *Plan of the Grounds and Buildings of the Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia, 1876*.
2. A scrapbook, *Recollections of Baptisttown*, an annotated collection of articles by Jay Bellis concerning the history of Baptisttown, published in the *Hunterdon Independent* (from 1893-1897) and collected by H.E. Deats, 1939.
3. A collection of photos, genealogical records, and family research concerning the history of the Woodsman family, of Summit, NJ, ca. 1920-1980. Wesley G. Woodsman is pictured.
4. A booklet, *Noteworthy Trees of New Jersey*, published by the New Jersey Department of Conservation and Development, 1937.

So, which of these records do you suppose that I decided to keep forever in the Society's archives, and why (or why not)? I will let you think about it and guess, and I will tell you in a series of follow up answers that I will post on our website and Facebook page. Hopefully, my answers will interest and inform you— and continue to answer the question of what an archivist does.

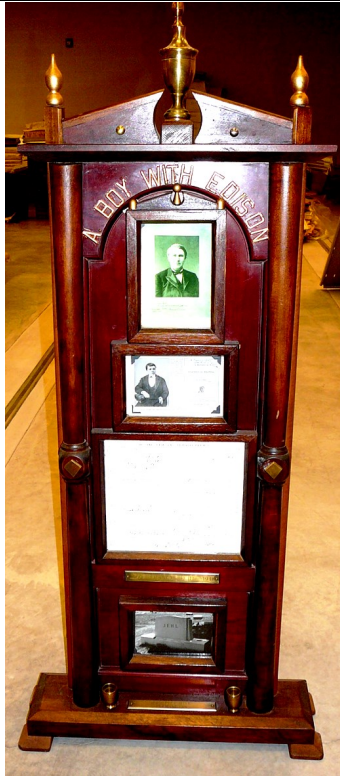
Look for those answers soon!

Spotlight on Collections: Francis Jehl & Thomas Edison

Who was Francis Jehl, memorialized in this pictured artifact from the Society's archives?

Jehl, who was born in New York City, went to work for Thomas Edison at his Menlo Park laboratory in February 1879 at the age of 19. He served as one of Edison's laboratory assistants during the development of the incandescent lamp and the complete system of generation and distribution of electricity and became a trusted employee.

Edison assigned Jehl to a European trip to promote the Edison system of electric lighting. During this time he assisted in getting the French Edison Company underway, oversaw the plant installed for lighting at the famed Brunn Theater in Austria, and in 1883 opened an Edison exhibit at the Vienna Electrical Exposition. Stranded in Europe at the close of



World War I, Jehl finally returned to the United States in 1922.

Beginning in 1937, he wrote a three-volume book describing his work under Edison and life in Menlo Park.

Jehl supervised Henry Ford's reconstruction of the Menlo Park laboratory at his Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan and became curator of the Edison collection there.

He passed away in St. Petersburg, Florida on February 9, 1941. A service was held for him at the Holcombe-Fisher Funeral Home in Flemington with burial in Flemington's Prospect Hill Cemetery.

The Society has no record of who created the memorial and also donated several other items related to Francis Jehl and Thomas Edison.

HCHS received an operating support re-grant from the Hunterdon County Cultural & Heritage Commission, with funds from the NJ Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State.

HUNTERDON COUNTY CULTURAL HERITAGE COMMISSION
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Hunterdon's History
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Historical Society
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