

# Hunterdon Historical Record



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COUNTY  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY

[hunterdonhistory.org](http://hunterdonhistory.org)

## Spring Book Sale May 6

Read any good books lately?

Well, if you're looking for a great read, you'll find an amazing selection at the Hunterdon County Historical Society's book sale on Saturday, May 6, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Doric House Museum, 114 Main St., Flemington.

HCHS will have a unique selection of books about townships and counties in Hunterdon County and throughout New Jersey, histories of other states, biographies, volumes on the American Revolution, the Civil War, World War II, antiques, old barns and homes, transportation — oh the list goes on and on!

You'll also find first editions, and reproductions of posters and postcards.

Don't miss out! Arrive early for the best selection.

Please remember to bring cash or a check as we cannot accept credit cards.

All proceeds benefit the HCHS and our mission to preserve, protect and share our county's history.

## Rachel Comes Home to Hunterdon County

After an absence of more than a century, the portrait of Rachel Wolverton Bonnell (1766-1836) returned home recently to Hunterdon County. The painting had traveled west to Indiana, Illinois, and eventually California. The portrait — painted by Rachel's son, the renowned Hunterdon County folk artist William Bonnell (1804-1865) -- was donated by Bonnell descendants Randall and Susan Frisk.

The story of Rachel's arrival has a touch of romance to it. Randall's parents, Donald and Susan Dobbins Frisk, wished to see Rachel reunited with the portrait of her husband, Clement du Mont Bonnell, which has been in the possession of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. since 1953. The National Gallery can devote only one room to folk paintings due to limited space, so Clement has never been exhibited. Fearing Rachel would suffer a similar fate, it politely declined the painting and suggested the Frisks contact HCHS, which had provided them information in the past about the Bonnell family.

So, while Rachel may not be with her husband, she now shares space with her daughter-in-law, Margaret Hinchman Bonnell (William's wife), as part of the HCHS Fine Art Collection. HCHS holds four other Bonnell paintings -- including a portrait of Mary Wolverton Bray (wife of American Revolutionary War patriot Daniel Bray) and the old Perryville Inn tavern sign of former president Andrew Jackson. A fifth painting of Anna Hope Foster is believed to have been painted by Bonnell too, but hasn't been confirmed.

"She is truly in the best place she could be," Susan Frisk said.

HCHS couldn't agree more. "We are thrilled to have Rachel back in Hunterdon County, and honored that the Frisks entrusted us with this family heirloom," said Board of Trustees President Janice Armstrong. "We thank the donors, and also want to express our gratitude to everyone who contributed to our 'Bring Rachel Home' campaign, which covered the shipping costs of getting the painting here."

HCHS plans to display Rachel's portrait with its other Bonnell paintings either in the Doric House or Deats Memorial Library. Events celebrating the portrait's addition to our collection are being planned. To learn more about our Bonnell paintings and the artist, visit [www.hunterdonhistory.org](http://www.hunterdonhistory.org).



**Kenneth Cummings, HCHS Board of Trustees Vice President and Rachel Wolverton Bonnell descendant; Janice Armstrong, HCHS Trustees President; and David Harding, staff Administrator, welcome Rachel back to Hunterdon County.**

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

- Cilento, Cara. A framed advertisement for the election campaign of Thomas B. Hampton, Candidate for Sheriff, n.d.
- Dilts, Thomas. A framed photograph of the Biggs-Ewing Family Reunion at the family farmstead in Pleasant Run, ca. 1910-1925.
- Floyd, Adele. A collection of materials from North Hunterdon Regional High School, including yearbooks, newsletters, photographs, and event programs, 1959-1962.
- Frank, Amy. From the estate of Laura Van Nuys: one pamphlet; 50th Wedding Anniversary celebration of Oscar and Margaret Van Lieu, 1989.
- Franklin Archives, % Lora Jones. A large donation of materials including records of Major Evelyn Lawson, US Army, 1945-1999; A box of records from the estate of Charles Mathews, varying subjects, ca. 1825-2001; A box of records from Township Historian Lora Jones, varying subjects, ca. 1953 - 2019; A box of records donated by Marty Campanelli, varying subjects, 1979-2015.
- Harding, David. One copy of Life Magazine, 12/8/1941, including article on Hunterdon residents William Lyndsay and Kathrine White of Kingwood.
- Hauck, Joe. A collection of records from the Sutton Farm in Tewksbury, NJ, including deeds, wills, receipts, bonds, and account books, ca. 1804-1967.
- Hintz, Carl. Fourteen boxes of genealogical notes, research, and manuscripts conducted and prepared by the donor on the Jones and Farley families of Hunterdon County, ca. 1757-2018.
- Leeds, JoAnn. Varying school materials including Echo yearbooks 1945-1948; Klinesville School class photo 1912; Clinton High School class photograph 1947; 1947 Flemington High School diploma of Ella Ida Weiss.
- Mahler, Linda. A panoramic photograph of the Robbins Family Reunion, 1930, with some individuals identified.
- Marchesani, Joseph. One road map, "Texaco Touring Map of New Jersey," 1951.
- Millner, Sarah and Barbara Gellner. One envelope of social calling cards from the Class of 1951, Flemington High School.
- Robinson, Pamela. One document: Authorization for Daniel Vanlien and John Carkhuff, exrs. for Henry Dilts of Hunterdon, to sell 160 acres in Hillsborough Township, 1829.
- Stevens, Stephanie. 1. Two scrapbooks, entitled "Farms and Farmers, Hunterdon County," 2013. 2. Three issues of "Student Voice," the magazine of Flemington High School, 1933-1934.
- Stewart, Lois. One photograph album; images of interiors of Hunterdon County homes and of a flood that occurred in Lambertville, ca. 1936-1937.
- Stothoff, Richard. A folder of materials including images of Pony Day and Heifer Show at the Flemington Fair; an image of Amos Fisher fishing in Three Bridges; and a booklet of records from the Democratic Civic League of Hunterdon County, 1959-1965.

**Major Evelyn Lawson**

## Acquisitions *continued*

Strus, Denise. Three folders of administrative subject files and miscellaneous records from the Union Township Historical Society, ca. 1986-2017.

Van Horn, Mary. One pamphlet; 150th Anniversary of Linvale United Methodist Church, 2008.

### **Library:**

Buchanan, James R. Three Buchanan Family Bibles: Thomas G. Butler, m. 1804, Rachel; m. 1837, Margaret CS-634; Lizzetta B. [Buchanan] Hoagland (b. 1888) CS-635; Michael Moore (1813-1879) m. 1847, Mary Wall (1825-1878) CS-636.

Davidson, Jim. *When the Circus Came to Town* (2022). Society purchase.

Hoskins, Barbara. *Washington Valley: an Informal History, Morris County, New Jersey* (1960). Donated by Pamelyn Bush.

Opdyke, Matthew R. *Genealogy of the Opdyke, Fenwick and Allied Families from the First European Immigrants to the 21st Century* (2022). Gift of the author.

Smith, Richard D. *Princeton* (Images of America). Donated by Nancy Feryok.

*St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi Parish: 175th Anniversary, 1847-2022*. Gift of the church.

Van Blarcom, Dave. *Van Blarcom, est. 1693*. Gift of the author.

Van Blarcom, Dave. *The Whitehead Family History* (2015). Gift of the author.

### **The following books were purchased with funds donated by Deborah Hoskins:**

Gardner, Lloyd C. *The Case that Never Dies: The Lindbergh Kidnapping* (2004).

Ogden, Evelyn Hunt, and Descendants of Founders of New Jersey. *Founder of New Jersey: First Settlements, Colonists, and Biographies by Descendants* (2016).

*Pennsylvania German Church Records of Births, Baptisms, Marriages, Burials, etc.: Vol. 1* / From the Pennsylvania German Society Proceedings and Addresses.

Weiss, Harry B., and Grace M. Weiss. *Trades and Tradesmen of Colonial New Jersey* (1965).

## Clarification

The recent donation by Marilyn Cummings, first noted in our fall 2022 newsletter, features an extensive collection of electronic materials and documentations based on her two decades of research, which provided the foundation for the [HistoryMapping.org](http://HistoryMapping.org) project. Her website is an encyclopedia of detailed descriptions of early houses, barns, outbuildings, churches, schools, mills, bridges, roads, etc. of Hunterdon County (and beyond) from past centuries. Setting them in chronological timelines, and geo-locating those structures where they are or were, tells the history of our area in a distinct and easily understood way.

## Spring Meeting and Program

Discover the human stories behind the histories of several of the Hunterdon County area's earliest buildings at our annual spring meeting and program on Sunday, March 19 at 2 p.m.

HCHS will welcome architecture historian Robert W. Craig, who will draw on his extensive research and his experience with the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office to discuss the building of "old" Hunterdon County.

The program will be held at the Flemington Presbyterian Church, 10 E. Main St. It's free, and everyone is welcome to attend.

Titled *They Will Build It, If You Come*, is derived, in part, on research Craig has done for a book about the building of the mid-Atlantic colonies.

"My research has revealed much about the building up of Hunterdon County during its first several decades, and about the persons who were involved in that construction," Craig said.

"I've been conducting this research for more than 20 years, in between other projects, and it arose from a desire to find additional methods to document early buildings, and to bring together the human stories of the buildings, themselves, together with a knowledge of them as designed physical artifacts," he noted.

Craig believes attendees will detect several key takeaways from his talk.

"First, colonial America is now far away in time, but its challenges and its accomplishments can still be well understood—much better understood than, in fact, they have been," Craig said. "Second, much more can be learned about those times, even in specific places such as Hunterdon County, if the names of the building tradesmen who constructed the county could be known. And third, it is possible to learn their names and important facts about them."

And what a researcher could learn about them turned out to be a bit of a surprise.

"I had some sense when I began that it was possible to identify who the builders were, because they were not exactly shy about naming the trades they practiced, but I didn't realize that it was possible to a considerable degree to trace individual careers in the building trades, even in the 17th and 18th centuries," he said.

Craig's work is well known to the historic preservation community. Craig was the editor of the book *Down Jersey, From Bayshore to Seashore*. In 2018, he completed a multi-year study of New Jersey's patterned brickwork buildings for which he received the Paul E. Buchanan Award from the Vernacular Architecture Forum.



**Robert W. Craig**

# Popular Tavern Had Its Sinister Side

By Dave Harding

By December of 1943, any hope of saving the old Larison Tavern had long-since passed. A local reporter, wandering about the dilapidated building like a melancholy ghost who had missed the party, marveled at the rotting remains of this once-popular landmark.

The tavern's great hand-hewn beams — joined by wooden pins and hand-cut nails — had kept the barn-like structure intact. But wind and rain had rotted the weaker weather-boarded sections, revealing the brick lining underneath. The 150-year-old lime and sand mortar crumbled to the touch and could be pushed from the bricks with an index finger. Above, the sagging roof admitted patches of blue sky. The veranda's floorboards, running parallel to the Old York Road, groaned beneath the tread of careless feet.

Of course, it wasn't always like this. Decades earlier, convivial parties of smartly dressed men and women danced the night away. Glasses clinked, and laughter echoed off its walls. Meanwhile above the revelers, gamblers hunched over playing cards in a windowless room. Supposedly, fortunes were lost and won overnight.

## Early Years

Though solid evidence of its earliest days are lacking, tradition states that wealthy landowner Tunis Quick loaned money in the late 1790s to an Englishman, George Thompson, so a tavern could be built. However, Quick acquired the building and its 55 acres in a sheriff's sale shortly thereafter.

Known in earlier days as Pleasant Corner Tavern, the establishment proved a popular and convenient stopping point. The Swift-Sure stage coach rumbled through, carrying passengers and mail between New York City and Philadelphia. The coach frequently stopped at the tavern to change horses, according to Imogene Van Sickle in her book, *The Old York Road and Its Stage Coach Days*.

A succession of owners operated the tavern during the early 1800s including Edmund Burke, Isaac Servis, and Joseph Kugler. Around 1829, Kugler sold the tavern for \$2,600 to its most popular proprietor, and the man for



*The Larison Tavern ca. 1940, shortly before being demolished.*

whom the area would later be known: John W. Larison.

He was born July 11, 1801, the third child of Andrew and Mary (Wilson) Larison. On May 9, 1822, he married Mariah Fisher, who lived on the old Fisher Homestead near Rocktown, and together they had four children: George, John Fisher, Lucretia Ann and Abraham. Larison was the uncle of Cornelius Larison, the doctor/pedagogue/author/champion of phonetic spelling,

and — as per the New York Times — a “world-class eccentric.”

## Under Larison's Ownership

The tavern became widely known during Larison's tenure. In the winter, young men and their sweethearts traveled by sleigh from as far away as Trenton and Easton, and when the weather turned warmer, coaches halted before its doors, dispensing youths ready to dance. “On these festive occasions the four large double doors, that divided the several rooms were opened, also a board partition at the west end of the bar room, which hung on hinges, was raised and fastened to the ceiling by immense iron hooks, converting the entire lower floor into a great ballroom,” Van Sickle wrote.

A 1929 *Hunterdon County Democrat* article records that “[t]he orchestra, a single fiddler, bolstered in his chair by plenty of drink, which was his only pay, sawed out the reels, waltzes, polka-mazurkas” demanded by the dancers.

The tavern also served as a makeshift headquarters for cattle herders and farmers. Herders drove their cattle from Pennsylvania and Ohio, turned them loose in the surrounding pastures and conducted a public auction from the tavern's veranda. These sales could last a week or more, according to the *Democrat*. During these times, the tavern rooms would be overfilled with four guests sleeping in one bed. A sign hanging in each room reminded patrons “Please Remove Your Boots Before Getting Into Bed.” Those without a room dozed in the hay mow, others in the stable.

*Continued on Page 5*

## Larison's Tavern (continued from previous page)

The cattlemen were a boisterous lot and – to put it mildly – not particularly kind. One anecdote tells of Prime Hoagland, who claimed he had a head so hard he could split a wheel of cheese with it. And he often proved his claim if free drinks were in the offing. One day, the cattlemen found a grindstone of similar dimension to a wheel of cheese, wrapped it in cheesecloth and set it on a stand. Hoagland got a running start and slammed his head into the grindstone, which fell with a resounding crash. The stone broke in its fall. One story claims Hoagland rubbed his head and said it was the hardest cheese he ever broke. Another says he suffered a concussion and swore revenge on the practical jokers.

The tavern had an even darker side. According to the *Democrat*, the tavern was thought to be “the greatest gambling house in the State” under Larison’s ownership, and games of dice, poker and faro were played under the watchful eye of a croupier.

The gambling den was nestled in the center of the second floor. Knock on the door, which was bolted from the inside, and a thin slat slammed open, revealing a pair of dark, questioning eyes. Inside, a few candles burned in sconces on the wall; in one corner a Franklin stove emitted heat. Card sharks enticed farmers into playing, only to fleece them of every dollar and dime in their pockets. Legend has it that one season an enterprising gambler fleeced the fleecers by playing the rube.

Fisticuffs frequently settled disputes whether they arose from matters of politics, religion or – well, anything that men loaded with liquor fight about. Surprisingly, only one man reportedly met his maker inside the tavern: He choked on a piece of beef while eating his dinner.

A stretch of Old York Road between the tavern and Reaville (back then, known as Greenville) was kept smooth for horse racing. Bets could range from a round of drinks to a hundred -acre farm.

Larison exited the tavern business shortly after the Civil War ended. He died on April 23, 1889 and is buried in Barber Cemetery in Mt. Airy. New tavern owner Augustus Blackwell ended the horse racing and kicked the gamblers out.

In 1932, the Plainfield Courier-News caught up with a former bartender, Bill Gulick, who postulated: “The ground that divides the infernal region from the people above it, is thinner at Larison’s Corner than it is any other place in the world. It is so thin that the flames of brimstone often leak through. . . From this bar into hell is but a step and many who drink here are soon to be found there.”

Ownership of the tavern continued changing hands. Sarah Ball was the last full-time tenant. She had a life right to the property and passed away in 1924. The family of George Conover were the last to reside there. Workers began razing the building in late 1943, finishing their demolition the following year.

## Flemington Methodist Church Celebrates 200 Years

By Lynn Becker

John Wesley, founder of Methodism, appointed Francis Asbury, his missionary in America, to travel from Philadelphia to Staten Island in 1771, which took him across Western New Jersey through what is now Flemington.

Records indicate that there was only Methodist Ralph Stout in Flemington in 1822. The first meeting was conducted in the courthouse by Davis and Issac James, two preachers from Trenton, at the invitation of Asher Atkinson, a Quaker. Soon after, a “class” was formed and the meeting place was a small house on the north side of Bonnell Street, the first house in Flemington, known then as the Miller House, and now known as the Samuel Fleming House, or the Fleming Castle Museum.

In 1823, Flemington became a recognized church in the Philadelphia Conference, and that fall, held its first “camp meeting” with 40 people joining the Methodist Episcopal Society, as it was known at that time. The term “society” was used by Wesley during the earlier years of the movement in England. John Atkinson, a cabinet maker from Philadelphia, became the first Class leader of the new Society and has been called the “father of Flemington Methodism.”

By 1824, the need for a Meeting House was clear. Funds were raised to buy a lot to construct a building at 21-27

Main Street, now the Post Office, and it was in use by 1826, and remained so until 1885. The courthouse burned in 1828 and was granted permission by a special act of the Legislature to hold court in the Flemington Methodist Episcopal Church until a new one could be erected.

During that time a “public whipping post” stood near the church property. When it was determined that the current building was inadequate, it was sold at auction for \$3,375, and the congregation moved back to the courthouse until they could raise \$5,000 to purchase the lot at 116 Main Street and build a new church at a cost of \$20,000. Ground was broken in July 1886 and ready for occupancy in June of 1887. A Mortgage Burning Jubilee was held in June 1889.

The first parsonage was at the corner of Park Avenue and Capner Street, housing many pastors until sold in 1822. It remains a private residence. The current parsonage on the corner of Maple Avenue and Spring Street was built in 1889.



1889 view of church from Maple Ave.

Continued on Page 6

## Thank You Donors and Welcome New Members

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### Flemington United Methodist Church (continued from previous page)

The 18th century ushered in many impressive additions to this space, among them the first pipe organ in 1901, electric lighting in 1917, and the renovation of a dirt-floor basement used for a recreation hall. In 1928, there were major changes to the choir loft and the purchase of a new "top quality" Moeller pipe organ. In 1945, as a memorial to the men that gave their lives in the war, chimes and sound amplification were added to allow the community to enjoy this musical enhancement. As the church grew, the need for improved facilities for the Church School

and recreational activities was evident. The opportunity to purchase the Doric House, which was being used as a restaurant, from Lucy Aalholm in 1956 was a perfect solution for the time: However, the need for more space to serve the youth, and other activities, prompted plans for an addition to the existing church building and sale of the Doric House.

For more information on the church's bicentennial celebrations during 2023, please visit [www.flemingtonumc.org](http://www.flemingtonumc.org) or follow the church on Facebook.

# An Update on the Asher Stryker Photo Collection

## By Don Cornelius

For this edition's article I thought I would revisit an older topic: the Asher Stryker Glass Plate Image Collection. Readers may recall that I wrote in detail about this collection back in the spring of 2021. I explained how excited we were with this acquisition of an estimated 900 glass plate negatives: beautiful photographs taken in Flemington and other places that detail so many aspects of life in the county. Later that year we asked our members to contribute to the preservation of this collection by donating toward the purchase of the archival supplies needed to care for it. The response was wonderful and many of you did support the work. I believe it's time to give a status report on the collection.

One year later, we have worked our way through the initial sort and re-housing of just over half the collection. The first stage was to unbind the several notebooks worth of developed out prints that accompanied the collection. These were removed from their old binders and placed into folders and archival boxes. Later, when we have worked our way through all of the glass plates, we will try to match up these developed prints to the glass negative from which they were developed.

The next stage was to begin unwrapping the glass plates, identifying the images, placing them in buffered archival sleeves, labeling the sleeves, and re-housing the plates into the special archival boxes designed to hold them. At the same time, we entered the identification for the image, along with any other pertinent information, into a spreadsheet that is building as we work our way through.

This is the stage we are in, and a couple of things have become apparent. First, this collection is taking far more time than originally considered. The main reason is that it is very difficult to work with the glass plates. They are very fragile – some are actually damaged – and they have to be handled with extreme care. It is easy to break them, and unfortunately it is also easy for them to cut us if we are not careful. Second, we seem to have underestimated the number of images. As of now, we have worked though just over three out of the original six wooden crates of images. That has produced 29 boxes of images (25 per box), for a total of 725 plates.

We originally estimated this collection to be 900 plates, but now we are revising that estimate upward to 1,200 or perhaps even more.

It will take a while longer to finish the first sort, labeling, and re-housing of the plates, along with the spreadsheet inventory of their contents. The third stage of working with this collection takes place when we look at our spreadsheet and decide how we are going to rearrange the plates. There are large portions of this collection that seem to belong together; meaning, there are multiple images about the same subject, event, person, or object. There are also sections of the collection that are jumbled up with no order at all. It will be our job to reorganize the plates into a coherent inventory, and then physically rearrange the plates to match what's in the boxes.

Then begins the last stage - sharing the collection with you! The information will all be added into our electronic catalog so researchers can search the collection for images of interest. At the same time, we will be strategically scanning and digitizing the collection, so that we can make the digital images available to the public with as much access as possible. I hope

that we will be able to create a gallery for display or perhaps even a presentation.

Finally, there are some images that will not be ready for prime time, so to speak. As we work on the collection, we are noting plates that are damaged in various ways. These will be set aside during the digitization process so that we can evaluate them further and decide which of them to send off for more advanced preservation work.

So, what type of images are in this collection?

There are distinct sections of glass plates, with similar groups of images. So far, we have identified the following groupings: Bellewood Park, Flemington baseball teams, Flemington bands, women's club carnivals, firemen's carnivals, Stryker (himself and his family), various people as subjects, sports, snow and ice photos, Flemington Library, Ringoes, floods, interior shots of people's homes, railroads, the Emery family's house and yard, horses, parks, the Mine Brook, and furniture. Remember, we are only a little over halfway through so more subjects may appear! We hope you enjoyed this update on a collection in process that many people have supported and want to see. I can't wait to share it with you!



**This image from the Asher Stryker Photo Collection shows the Flemington Women's Club carnival of 1908.**

# Spotlight on Collections: Flour Power

By Dave Harding

Sometimes, even small and rather innocuous objects can conjure up memories and stories from Hunterdon County's rich past.

Take these unused bags from Tiger's Prepared Buckwheat, Wheat and Corn Flour manufactured by H.G. Geist Co. of Califon, New Jersey.

The Harry G. Geist Company was a feed and grain business that operated a mill on the South Branch of the Raritan River beginning around 1917. It manufactured and marketed its own brand of flour, Tiger's, and specialized in custom milling and the sale of farm machinery.

Its owner was born in Middle Valley on Sept. 23, 1890, the son of John B. Geist and Elizabeth Perrine of High Bridge. His father came to the United States from Germany at the age of 14 and learned the blacksmith trade



(Masonic) Lodge in High Bridge.

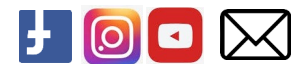
Mr. Geist passed away on November 9, 1969. His son, Robert A. Geist, was serving as mayor of Califon at the time. The stone Geist Mill, which had been declared an historic site, was torched by arsonists with gasoline or a similar flammable liquid in April 1973.

before becoming manager of the C.C. Demarest Creamery. On Oct. 27, 1914, Harry Geist married Helen L. Haggerty and together they had four children.

His work in public service was quite extensive. He served as mayor of Califon for 22 years (1934-1956) and also a term as treasurer of Hunterdon County during the 1930s.

In addition, he was a charter member, former fire chief and the first president of the Califon Fire Department. Just before passing, he had received his 50-year token as a member of the Hobart F. and A.M.

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