

The Chester Historical Society's



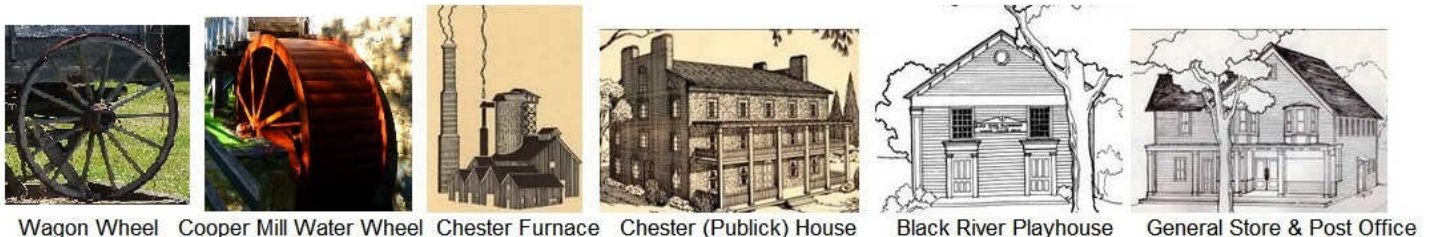
Dear CHS Members and Friends, happy summer! I hope the spring wasn't too soggy for you and your summer is off to a good start. This newsletter officially kicks off CHS' 50th Anniversary Celebrations by introducing our anniversary emblem logo. Another celebration story follows, the 20th Birthday of the Chester Area Pool. The pool wouldn't have been built except for the extraordinary efforts of dedicated citizens. Continuing on the theme of recognition and honor, we highlight 7 notable historic Chester women. We then have a fun look back at 3 events that CHS sponsored or were participants: Cabin Fever Cure at The Maple Shop, Finding Kate Macy Ladd at the Chester Library, and Cooper Gristmill's Chester Railroad Extravaganza. In late breaking news, the Isaac Corwin House aka Larison's Turkey Farm, unfortunately made Preservation New Jersey's 2019 list of 10 Most Endangered Historic Places. The back story starts on page 17.

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The Chester Historical Society Kicks Off 50th Anniversary Celebrations

By Edward Ng - Chester Historical Society



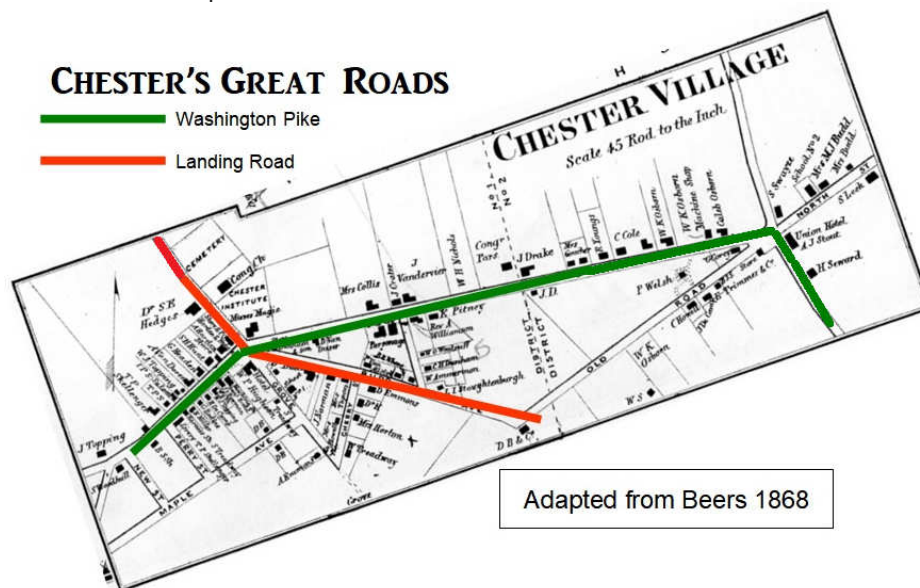
(50th Anniversary Celebrations Story continues on next page.)

1969 was an historic year: Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin walked on the moon, the first for mankind, the "Miracle Mets" won the Baseball World Series, a first for an expansion team, 400,000 folks attended the Woodstock Music Festival, and perhaps not quite as monumental, the Chester Historical Society was founded, chartered, and incorporated.

As part of CHS' 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration, we have commissioned the creation of a new emblem logo. The original logo was created in 1970 by Len Taylor (according to Lois, in one night!) and is a combination of a monogram logo (**CHS**) and a wordmark logo (distinctive text only version of organizational information (**CHESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY – CHARTERED 1969**) see the previous logo on the left side of the masthead above). We wanted the new logo to be more informative of Chester's history and reflect CHS' mission to research, preserve, share, and educate.

Emblems are one of nine logo types which are suited to telling a story, as they are combinations of monograms, wordmarks, and images. "Emblems are memorable, and they lend an air of professionalism, traditionalism and importance to your brand. They also give the impression that your company has been around forever, and isn't going anywhere any time soon.<sup>1</sup>" That is a very fitting description for CHS' 50th Anniversary.

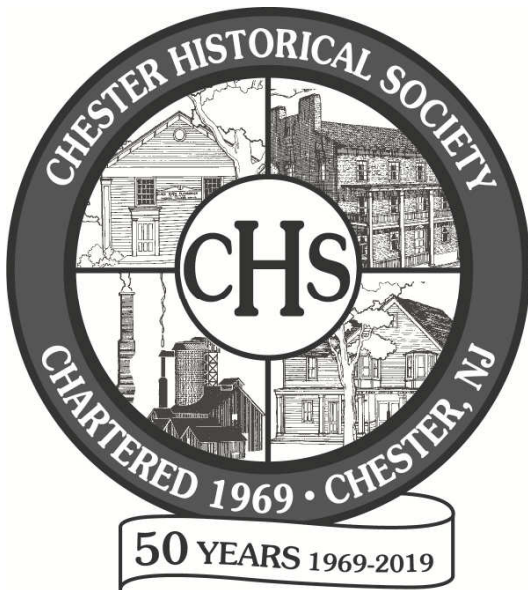
Chester's history is multi-faceted. Long before the Europeans arrived, the Lenni-Lenape lived here and traversed the landscape on well-worn trails. Two of those trails would become the main roads of the new village of Black River (later renamed Chester). Transportation is integral to our history, e.g. crossing Chester were wagons heading east-west from New York to Pennsylvania on the Washington Pike and south-north from Brunswick Landing to Sussex County. Those were Chester's historic "Great Roads" (now Hillside Road-Budd Ave. and Main St.). Travelers, wagon drivers, merchants, and drovers would stop in Chester for food, supplies, refreshment, and a safe place to rest in taverns and hotels. Chester's farmers transported their agricultural bounty to markets on those wagons. Later, not one but two railroads, the Central of New Jersey and the Delaware-Lackawanna & Western, would service Chester. Here is a map of the Great Roads based on the 1868 Beers Map.



<sup>1</sup> Tailor Brands, "The Nine Types of Logos and How to Use Them", <https://www.tailorbrands.com/logo-maker/types-of-logos>

Chester's geography would also prove supportive of water-driven industries such as the Cooper Gristmill. Veins of accessible iron ore were another natural resource that shaped Chester's history, establishing and supporting numerous mines. The culmination of the iron era was W.J. Taylor's technologically advanced Chester Furnace. Our history would not be complete without recognizing that commerce, for example the ubiquitous "general store", has been a Main Street presence for over 200 years. Chester's history is also replete with other blessings which can be seen in our religious, educational, cultural, and governmental buildings. The ideal logo would reference that story, but it would not need to spell it out completely. It would be representative and symbolic.

Here is the vision. We started with a circle representing a wagon wheel, the Cooper Mill water wheel, and a train wheel. Centered in it would be a "+" representing the Lenni-Lenape trails and the Great Roads, but also reminiscent of wheel spokes. A "CHS" monogram was placed in the center where the wheel axles would be. In each of the quadrants, we placed images representing Chester's history: the Chester Furnace evocative of our mining heritage, the Publick House (originally the Chester House Hotel then a school then a restaurant/hotel), and the Black River Playhouse (previously a Baptist church, a Methodist church, the Town Hall for Chester and then the Borough, and now home to the Chester Theatre Group). To symbolize commerce we used what was originally the Luse Tavern, established around 1740 and converted into a general store around 1800. For almost 220 years that location has hosted a store and/or post office and is now The Maple Shop.



Working with Ashton Designs of Long Valley, we created our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Emblem. We kept Len Taylor's monogram and wordmark and used his drawings of the Publick House and the Chester Furnace. Line drawings of the Black River Playhouse and the Luse Tavern are in the upper left and lower right quadrants. They were adapted from *The Almagest's Chester Bicentennial Sketch Book*. The wagon wheel, Cooper Mill waterwheel, and train wheels are the circles. The Lenni-Lenape trails and the Great Roads are represented by the horizontal and vertical lines.■

## Happy Birthday Chester Area Pool!

By Marla A. Jackson – Chester Historical Society

Have you thought that the Chester Area Pool (CAP) was "always" here? Did you think that it was built by the municipal governments? Well, you would be wrong. On June 19, 2019, CAP will be 20 years old and, although 20 years isn't that old by Chester history standards, it still is an historic



development. So to commemorate its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I thought it might be nice to relate how it came into being and honor those residents who did so much to make it happen.

**Editors Note:** It would take almost 4 years before the scene below would become a reality: 6 Chester "dignitaries" taking an inaugural plunge into the new Chester Area Pool in June 1999. Extra credit if you can identify all six. The names have not been changed to protect the innocent and are listed at the end of the article. (Image from Daily Record, June 20, 1999)

### **Everyone into the pool!**



In 1995, the Borough and Township were notified that the estate of Virginia June Hinds, a teacher, swim instructor, founding member of the Black River Playhouse and advocate for children, had died and left a bequest of \$250,000 (\$412,000 in 2018 dollars) to the municipalities of Chester Borough and Chester Township to build a municipal pool. The wording, which would become significant later, was that "the pool had to be constructed within three years after the municipalities received the money" or the money would go to her other heirs. The municipalities were notified of the bequest in November of 1995. I was the President of the Chester Borough Council at the time, and was quite excited about the possibility of a public pool complex. It would be a wonderful opportunity to teach children to swim, for adults to exercise, and to have a place where the whole community could enjoy the summer.

The Chester Borough Council decided it was reasonable to look into building a pool as it would be a benefit to the community. However, the Township Mayor and Council did not believe that residents in the Township would want or need a community pool and were extremely hesitant to commit money or manpower to the pool. They did allow the Borough to take over the initial inquiries, and essentially use their part of the bequest, but decided against committing money or Township resources to the project, and certainly did not want to be involved in building or managing the facility.

As no other Borough Council members seemed interested, I searched for a few volunteers who could help determine community interest and the viability of building a pool in Chester. An ad hoc committee was formed, and numerous volunteers came and went, but several stalwarts would join the ad hoc committee and remain as a core of people that would keep the pool project going. Two of the original committee members that stayed to see water fill the pool were Jan Hunkele and Julia Robinson. Jan took on the role of fund-raiser extraordinaire. She was always ready to organize a golf outing or an event to help the pool concept come to fruition. When funds were needed for the design or down payment, Jan was there to get the fund-raising organized. The events were always fun and brought loads of positive attention to the pool. I don't think the pool would be here without her support and expertise. Julia Robinson became a one-person advocate for the pool, stopping people any time and everywhere to charm them into a donation or other support for the pool. Julia was also the Chief Financial Officer of the Borough at the time, so she encountered every resident from the Borough at one time or another. She was active in many community organizations too, so she reached people in the Township as well as neighboring communities. In addition, Debby Wolf, the Chair of the Chester Borough Recreation Commission, was a significant part of the team since a community pool would add plenty of opportunities for recreation. She gave our committee standing as a subcommittee of the Recreation Commission and she worked continually to see the pool happen.

The committee members, having no pool building experience, contacted the YMCA on Horsehill Road in Cedar Knolls, hoping we would have a working partner with knowledge and experience. The Y spent two days in Chester scheduling interviews with residents, asking questions of officials, and assessing public interest in having a municipal pool. Although they discovered the interest was strong, the Y decided not to become involved in the endeavor, believing Chester was too far away for administrative oversight, but a pool so close might end up undercutting membership at their facility. Wow, you can't get any more complicated than that! Now what? Well, we knew there was significant interest in a community pool, but how do we get it built? About the time the Y bowed out, we recruited Bill McLaughlin (from Pleasant Pools in Chester, of course) to give us the benefit of his expertise in building and maintaining pools.

My idea was to ask the municipalities to bond for the money needed to identify a location and develop a plan. Chester Township's mayor at the time, Ken Caro, had said from the outset that the township would not be interested in a municipal pool. Rumor had it that Mayor Caro had said that residents in the township built their own backyard pools if they wanted to swim! Shortly after, I approached the Chester Borough Mayor and Council with a proposal to make available about \$27,000 to do the study, but the vote was 1 to 5 against the proposal. Yep, I was the only one to vote in favor of it. There must be another way...and there was!

We knew people were interested in a municipal pool. We needed to identify a location and develop a budget. The committee had already identified three tentative locations: Chubb Park, Grove Street Park, and property adjacent to Black River Middle School. These locations were already owned by a public entity and all had some characteristics that made them attractive. Each had drawbacks too.

## Chester council dunks swimming pool bonds

Observer Tribune Nov. 20, 1997

By ELLEN S. WILKOWE  
Staff Writer

CHESTER — It was more sink than swim Monday, as the Borough Council voted 5-1 against bonding \$2.5 million to finance the construction of a self-sustaining swimming pool.

"The risk is just too high," concluded Councilman Jerry Shamas, who voted with the majority.

### Risk cited in 5-1 vote

tion is studying the CAP committee's request to lease five acres of land at the Black River Middle School off North Road (Route 513) as the pool site.

The proposed pool would be open to membership by residents

ity that would equally serve other municipalities.

According to a financial analysis presented to the borough by the CAP committee, only 68 of the 451 households in the borough affirmed they would join the pool membership. Councilman Valle Schloesser said officials in Chester Township declined to participate on the grounds that the "project is too big for the borough and the township together."

Enter the Chester Borough Recreation Commission, headed by Debby Wolf. Joan Prach volunteered to become the Chair and leader of the "Chester Area Pool" sub-committee of the Chester Borough Recreation Commission. That name for the pool would eventually become the name of the pool complex, CAP for short. We also acquired another hard-working volunteer in Warren Billings. Joan and Warren began to visit municipal pools and develop a list of pool architects.




Meanwhile, we needed \$27,000 to begin the design process. We thought it might help to have a logo, which would help to project an image for the pool. Fortunately, Kevin Newman, Mayor Hugh Newman's son, was willing to design it for us, and that's the round logo that ultimately appeared on the membership brochures, swim team sign-up sheets and some wonderful fundraising items, like tote bags and t-shirts. We decided to hold a series of fund-raisers to enable the project to go forward, with the goal of raising the \$27,000 to begin the design process. Jan Hunkele was instrumental in organizing the fund-raising. With the help of Donna Price, the Chester Borough Recreation Commission members, and members of the pool committee,

two art auctions were held in 1997 and 1998, a beefsteak dinner, Tricky Trays and several golf outings were organized, and, with a significant donation from Andy Hall, it was possible to proceed with the feasibility study to determine the best site and proceed with the design. After inquiries and interviews, Gaston Lawrence Raffaelli, P.E. P.P. was hired to evaluate the sites, develop a timeline for construction and propose an initial plan.

In 1998, the Friends of CAP was incorporated as a way to raise funds to support the pool and the "extras" that the pool complex might need. The trustees of Friends of CAP were Jan Hunkele, Joan Prach, and Debby Wolf. The funds raised by this dedicated and active committee would ultimately include planting the Memorial Circle in honor of June Hinds, purchasing starting platforms for the swim team, market umbrellas, and lounge chairs. The beautiful brick walkway around the flagpole was another fundraiser. Seeing the names engraved on the bricks of so many residents reminds us of the truly community-wide support the pool received. Friends of CAP also sponsored various activities after the pool was complete, like teen nights, Tricky Trays, ice cream socials and dinners, to encourage evening use of the facilities.

Once planning was underway, the committee also decided to offer "charter memberships" to help fund pool development costs. These charter members would receive a discount on the initiation fee, with a promise of a refund if the pool did not come to fruition. Over 300 individuals and families became Charter Members even before the shovel was in the ground.

Now that the seed money was in hand, Joan Prach and Warren Billings spoke to pool builders and architects, and finished their evaluation visits. An initial plan for the pool complex came in at \$2.5 million, which included an Olympic sized pool, diving area, shallow children's pool, food building, and restrooms and changing buildings, as well as an administrative building. That plan was voted



**Chester Area Pool**  
**Charter Membership Drive**  
**Offer Expires 1/31/98**

The Chester Area Pool (CAP) Committee is at a critical point in the development of an outdoor pool in Chester. The targeted opening date of this aquatic facility is the summer of 1999. Seasonal memberships will be offered to Chester residents and non-residents living in surrounding communities. Further confirmation of public interest in joining this community pool is needed for CAP to proceed with this project.

A one-time only initiation fee will be charged to all new pool members. CAP is currently offering **CHARTER MEMBERSHIPS WITH DISCOUNTED INITIATION FEES** to persons willing to make early membership commitments by January 31, 1998. Initiation fees are non-refundable, but if for any reason the pool is not built, your money will be refunded to you, plus interest.

Charter Membership initiation fees are:  
 \$100 Single & Family  
 \$ 50 Seniors (age 65 and over)

In the future, Family initiation fees are estimated to be between \$300 and \$400. Seasonal Family memberships will be accepted in early 1999 and they are estimated to be between \$350 and \$450. Seniors and Single initiation fees and memberships will be proportionately less.

Questions??? Call (908) 879-5361 extension 3221 and we will return your call.

down by the Chester Borough Council and panned by the Township too. Back to the drawing board! A scaled back plan, which included an Olympic sized pool, a shallow children's pool, sand play area, shower and restroom building as well as parking and food and beverage service was presented to both municipalities. On February 2, 1998 the Borough Mayor Hugh Newman and Council passed a resolution to bond for their portion of the building funds, with the Mayor voting to break the tie in favor of bonding. The Township, too, was receptive to the scaled down plan.

In the end, the Borough would bond for \$300,000 and the Township for \$400,000 (with the stipulation that their bond would be paid off first). The understanding was that the Borough would establish a self-funding pool utility and oversee all the obligations of day to day operation of the utility. Jim Doherty, the Borough's Administrator Clerk, made sure the bonding went smoothly. Another valuable CAP volunteer, Peter Messina, an engineer who helped review the construction proposals, would continue to examine plans and help keep the construction on track. Later, as the second stage began, Messina would work with R & R Construction to make sure that the septic was completed within budget, as the estimates for construction were much higher than anticipated. Russ Duryea and R & R Construction would end up donating equipment and labor to get the septic installed. There couldn't be a pool complex without it!

But could the pool be built in time to receive the bequest? As site selection was completed and the proposal to build the pool was being sent out, the Borough decided to sue the estate in court to determine exactly when the pool needed to be completed in order to receive the bequest. Judge Stanton ruled that the pool must be "substantially completed by November 21, 1998" in order to fulfill the obligations of Miss Hind's will.

The first phase of the construction contract was awarded to Paddock Atlantic Pools and construction began during the third week in July on the 4.7 acre parcel at Black River Middle School. This phase would include the main pool, pool maintenance equipment and fencing. On a beautiful, sunny day, a groundbreaking ceremony was held on August 8, 1998. By the following January, there would be 518 Charter Members. The remaining 132 memberships would also be filled, and 50 people were placed on the waiting list. The size of the pool dictated the number of memberships that would be

offered, which was calculated by the engineers as 650.

So far, so good!

By November, the main pool was completed, and filled with water. A pool opening was held, even though coats, not swimsuits, were the order of the day! Best of all, although the heirs challenged the release of the Hinds' bequest, Judge Stanton ruled the construction of the pool was 95% complete. The Hinds' bequest had grown to \$273,765. However, not everything had been completed. Phase two would include the installation of the septic, landscaping, interior sidewalks, restrooms and changing areas, as well as the administration building. That phase would take a little longer and the pool would not open to the membership until Memorial Day 1999, according to the plan. Some things took a little longer than planned but on June 19, 1999, CAP was dedicated with an opening ceremony and the CAP committee and Chester dignitaries took the first plunge!



(Photo by Garry Herzog)

### Let The Dirt Fly

Observer Tribune Aug. 13, 1998

Representatives of groups that have worked together to launch the Chester community pool project prepare to let the dirt fly at Saturday's ground-breaking. From left are Chester Township Mayor Kenneth Caro, Chester Board of Education President Jeffrey Koch, Chester Area Pool Committee Chairwoman Joan Prach and Chester Borough Mayor Hugh Newman Jr.

More projects would need to be done before the complex was finished. No "snack shack" was completed that first year, even though it was on the

plan. That would take a season and more funding. And the Optimists and Friends of CAP would purchase the shade structures and trees in 1999. Joan Prach would personally see that the trees were selected and arrived in good condition. Maintenance and improvements would be ongoing. As the pool complex was expanded over the following years, the number of memberships would grow too. In 2018, there were a total of 2,765 memberships, with 1,591 from Borough and Township residents and 1,174 memberships from "out of town" residents.

Looking back now, there were so many instances where the entire project hinged on a decision that could easily have gone against the development of the pool and would have ended the project. When the Township decided against being an active participant, the Borough had every reason to do the same. When the YMCA decided not to participate in the pool development, the Borough could have given up. When the pool committee needed a dedicated chair to oversee and coordinate the project, Joan Prach stepped up. When the Raffaelli feasibility study was completed, identifying Black River Middle School as the best location, the Chester Township Board of Education could easily have voted against leasing the property to the CAP utility (and it was very close). When it was time to approve the Borough bond for the pool, the Council vote was tied and hinged on Mayor Newman to cast the deciding, affirmative vote. When the Borough went to court to find out exactly when the pool had to be done in order to receive the bequest, it was a tight timeframe. The engineers thought the pool could be completed, but there was no guarantee. And when phase two ended up costing more than anticipated, R & R Construction stepped in to complete the septic. Most of all, it was the donations and support of the community that carried the project to completion.

On December 14, 1998, the Borough of Chester named Joan Prach "Citizen of the Year" at the annual ceremony, honoring a dedicated volunteer who made a difference in our community. The Optimists also honored Joan for her hard work and dedication to CAP by bestowing on her their "Friends of Youth" award.

Margaret Meade said "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has." We owe the existence of the Chester Area Pool to Joan Prach, Julia Robinson, Warren Billings, Jan Hunkele, Debby Wolf, Peter Messina, Harry Hagar and everyone else that helped make it a reality. And it would never have happened without the amazing generosity of Virginia June Hinds.■

**Editors Note: Who are those daring folks jumping into the pool on 6-19-09? L-R: Joan Prach, Valle Schloesser, Pete Messina, Warren Billings, Bob Davis, and Julia Robinson.**

**Chester Area Pool in June 2019, Virginia June Hinds legacy lives on, alive with sport and fun.**



**Olympic size CAP pool**



**Plaque honoring June Hinds**



**Fun pool showering mushroom**




Editors Note: To commemorate International Women's Day in March 2019, the Chester Historical Society and the Chester Library created displays honoring Notable Historic Chester Women. Those displays are reprised in this newsletter with the addition of Carmen Smith. An updated version of the display is scheduled for July 2019 on the Chester Library art wall.



**Janet Abeles (1908-1992)**  
**Chester Borough Mayor and Much More**  
 By Edward Ng - Chester Historical Society

Janet Abeles was Chester Borough Mayor for eight years, the first woman mayor, a Democrat, and elected to this office at age 67. Using grit and shoe leather she upset 14-year Republican incumbent Mayor Joseph Filiberto. There's much more to the Janet Abeles story.




**DEFEAT**

**A dejected Joseph Filiberto drops into a pocket the returns he has just tallied at the municipal building. They added up to his defeat for reelection after 14 years as mayor of Chester (Mandy)**

*'It's A Woman's World'*

**Abeles Defeats Mayor Filiberto;**

By CONNIE SUNNERT  
 CHESTER — It was an historic night in Chester Tuesday when Mrs. Janet Abeles, 66, a woman, and a Democrat, won this tiny town's hotly contested mayoral race by 17 votes.  
 By an even narrower margin, another woman Democrat, Frances Brander, defeated incumbent Wally Ward by only eight votes for a Borough Council seat. The Republicans did retain their other two seats, as incumbents John MacDougall Jr. and Wilbur Rutike beat two Democratic college students, Lawrence Parler and Joseph Luteran.  
 At 8:10 p.m. residents were still pulling the levers in the voting machines. As they walked out of the municipal building, a group of quietly nervous Republicans waiting outside, noted counted voters. Voter number 517, voter number 418, finally the last voter, number 529, left the building.  
 People said the turnout of 29 per cent must be some kind of record. There are only 471 registered voters in town.  
 People said it was a larger turn out than Chester has known even in Presidential elections.  
 Inside the municipal building, a small, quiet crowd of familiar faces, many long time Chesterites and some incumbent office holders, stood about awaiting the results.  
 A few minutes later, after her victory was announced, Mrs. Abeles's home on Budd Street was alive with a mass of noisy young people crowd-



**VICTORY**

**Chester's new mayor, Democrat Janet Abeles, accepts a congratulatory phone call at her home, which was crowded with supporters celebrating her victory Tuesday night. (Mandy).**

**Observer Tribune - November 7, 1974**

(Janet Abeles served as Chester Borough Mayor 1975-1982.)

Before being elected mayor, the divorced mother of two sons earned her BA and MA degrees from Kean College and was a teacher. At the age of 55 she joined the Peace Corps and taught in Tanzania for two years. Returning to Chester, she served two terms as mayor and just missed winning a third term by 15 votes. She engaged in a slew of community activities. She helped establish Chester Area Senior Housing complex (their community room is named for her). She was the founder and president of the Chester PTA, a charter member of the Welkind Hospital Auxiliary, a member of the Chester Library Board, chairman of local Social Service for the American Red Cross, chairman of the Chester Horse Show, chairman of the American Heart Association Drive, and a Girl Scout Leader.

Statewide, she was named to the Governor's Panel on Aging by Gov. Brendan Byrne in 1980. In 1977, the Kean College Alumni Association honored her as the "outstanding alumna" in the field of arts and sciences.

Janet Abeles admitted she was a "late bloomer", but she always "listened to her heart and believed in herself". She was an energetic and wise leader who led from her heart.■

## Lois Anna "Tommie" Barker (1923-2018)

### Professional Women's Baseball Player

By Deb Schiff - Chester Library, Local History Librarian



Born to Harry and Nora Barker, Lois Anna "Tommie" played baseball from age three onward. The Roxbury High School graduate (1941) played softball on the school team, and earned fame for an unassisted triple play as a shortstop for the Chester Farmerettes. As a teen, she tried out for the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, and played for a year as a Grand Rapids (Michigan) Chick in 1950. Her team patch is shown below.

Barker spoke about one particular game in a 2015 Chester Library oral history interview:

I can remember getting hit in the head with the first fly ball I went to field. I had never played under the lights... I was playing right field, and I can remember I

saw the ball go up and then I lost it in the lights. I had no idea where it was, but it knew where I was! It came down and hit me right here on the forehead. I thought... I'm going to be on the first train back to New Jersey! But the manager said no, it was understandable and you'll get used to playing under lights after you do it a while... He was Johnny Rawlings, and he played second base for the New York Giants.

She returned to Chester to care for her ailing father, and began working in the waveguide department at Cooperative Industries, formerly of Oakdale Road in Chester. She retired as a supervisor, after 40 years of service to the organization. Tommie explained her work in the same oral history interview,

I did a lot of the soldering of the products we made, what they called in those days, "silver soldering." It was done with acetylene tanks... We made what they call "waveguides" for radar. We also built [supplies] for airplanes... Basically, they manufactured metal hose for oil lines... Then, we made parts for airplane engines for GE. They made molded lines. It was all done for the aircraft industry. ■

Editors Note: In an interview with Sandy Seegers (Daily Record May 31, 1998), Tommie talked about the "lie of her life". In March 1950 "I wanted to try out for the All American Girls Professional Baseball League and I thought if I was too old they wouldn't take me. That's why I told them I was 21 years old. I was really 27." 174 women tried out and she was one of only 18 to make the league. This was a chance to achieve the "dream of her life" and she grabbed it. In 1998 she was recognized by the National Baseball Hall of Fame for her play with the Grand Rapids Chicks. After her career ended, she remained an inspiration to all ball players and a booster for the game.



## Mary Carolyn (Mae) Call (1909-1997)

### English Teacher, Chester Theatre Member, and WWII Newsletter Creator By Mary Lou Call Robinson, Sally Call Fuller, and Bob Call



Born to William and Sarah Scheld in Long Island, NY, Mary Carolyn (Mae) later became a favorite English teacher to many Chesterites. During high school, the Schelds moved to Naughtright, NJ, where her father farmed. To reach Roxbury High School, she took two trains to Succasunna.

She matriculated at New Jersey College for Women, Rutgers University, in 1923, graduating with majors in French and History. Her first job after graduation was teaching history at Netcong High School. Later she joined the faculty at Roxbury High School, her alma mater, and began teaching English. She became head of the English Department and began directing the theatre program and debating teams. In September 1934, she married Robert Call, whose family also lived in town. They had three children: Mary Lou, Bob, and Sally.

Call became a local figure in the arts scene, presenting monologues and joining the Second Nighters, and later the Chester Theatre Group. According to the Chester Historical Society, Mae co-directed CTG's first production, "Our Town" in 1959, and directed, produced, and starred in many subsequent productions. She mentored the Senior Dramatics Club at Roxbury High School, which staged 75 productions. Photo of Call with fellow Chester Theatre Group members courtesy of Sally Call Fuller.



During World War II, Call founded a monthly newsletter, "The Honor Roll", mailed to Chester sons and daughters serving in the war. It was a labor of love for her and Bob Grady, friend and fellow Chesterite, who printed the issues at his firm in New York City. These newsletters were sold locally at 5 cents a copy to defray printing and mailing costs. At the end of the war, they were each presented a plaque and citation signed by over 100 returning servicemen. ■

Editor's Note: In an interview with Frances Greenidge (*Chester, New Jersey – A Scrapbook of History*), Mae recalled using ingenuity and imagination as she wrote her "Honor Roll copy" — her bits of home news — with a delightful light touch. Occasionally a "surprise" was attached, such as a stick of gum, or a razor blade. Every issue had pictures — of Chester girls; of servicemen, of a Fourth of July parade, of familiar houses and buildings, in May- of some mothers, and in June- of some fathers, of special girlfriends, or of dazzling movie stars sprinkled throughout for spice. There were cartoons and jokes, often "pinned" onto local people. There were always notes about and addresses of servicemen, and reports of local deaths and marriages.



## **Margaret Brookes Hutcheson (1871-1959)** **Pioneer Landscape Architect and Creator of Bamboo Brook**

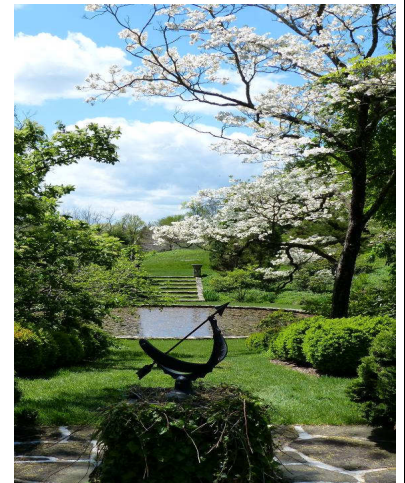
**By Edward Ng – Chester Historical Society**

Martha Brookes Hutcheson is best known for her book, *The Spirit of the Garden* which described good landscape design principles for 1920s suburban families. First printed in 1923, the book was a commercial success and was republished in a 2001. It was hailed by landscape architects as the “first account by a woman practitioner to combine a discussion of design with an extensive visual presentation of her own work.” In her lectures and her writings, she was vocal about her belief that landscape architecture could be used for the betterment of society. In 1935, she was the third woman to be elected a Fellow of the American Society of

Landscape Architects.

Martha Brookes (Brown) Hutcheson was born in New York City in 1871 to a relatively wealthy family with prominent social connections. She moved to Vermont when she was young, and there she developed a love of gardening. From 1893-1895 she studied at the New York School of Applied Design for Women. In the late 1890's she augmented her formal education with a tour of Europe and gardens in England, France and Italy. These travels influenced her design philosophy, which emphasized axis and views and incorporated Italian architectural elements. Her gardens were noted for spatial organization and her emphasis on quality plantings.

From 1900 to 1903 she was one of the first women enrolled in the landscape architecture program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and went on to become one of the first women landscape architects in the US. She had over 60 commissions, consultations, and works across the Northeast, including her own home, Merchiston Farm, NJ, now the Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center (photo right). The image shows the sun dial in the round garden with the swimming pool in the background.



Hutcheson's social impact went beyond landscape architecture. In a memoir by Ruth Hill Thomson, she recalled her helping to establish the Women's Land Army of America (WLAA) during WWI. The purpose of the WLAA was to alleviate the shortage of farm laborers by utilizing women in those jobs. President and Mrs. Woodrow Wilson strongly supported those efforts and even raised sheep in the White House gardens. After the war, the experience of WLAA prompted her to write about changing the purpose of local garden clubs. She wrote a paper published in the 1919 Bulletin of the Garden Club of America, "A Wider Program for Garden Clubs". The paper encouraged clubs to go beyond social activities and be more active in community beautification, education, and conservation. These are now part of the mission of the Garden Club of America, an organization with over 18,000 members. ■

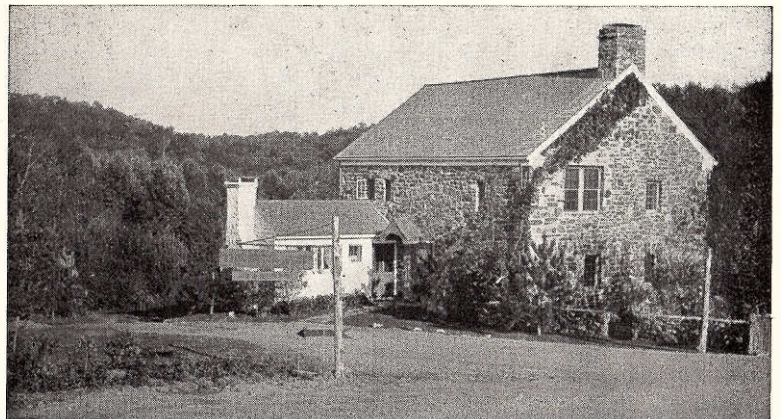


**Elizabeth Donnell Kay (1894-1987)**  
**Herb Entrepreneur, Conservationist, and**  
**Philanthropist**  
**By Edward Ng – Chester Historical Society**

In the 1930's and early '40s, Elizabeth Kay was a food star -- not quite a Martha Stewart, but she was a "foodie" in her own time, extolled on radio and print for her Herb Farm enterprise on State Park Road. She and her husband were very wealthy, and she always had a keen interest in horticulture and gardening. She became obsessed with a corner of her garden where herbs grew. A serendipitous visit by the famed plant explorer, Dr. David Fairchild, led to experimentation to develop ways to dry, preserve, mix, and prepare herbs for culinary use. At the same time that a

derelict "four square" barn with 3-foot thick stone walls came to her attention, a request from two Girl Scout leaders (with cooking talent) came looking for work.

The barn was refurbished, the Scout leaders hired, and the Herb Farm Tea Room was launched. Elizabeth and her team "blended and powdered combinations of herbs for culinary use" in a manner any cook would understand and not be afraid to use. The quality of the herbs and Tea Room offerings were spread first by word of mouth by patrons at the Tea Room (more than 400 a day), then on radio by Mary Margaret McBride, the "First Lady of Radio", and in Duncan Hines'



Outside View—Herb Farm Tea Room

*Adventures in Good Eating at Home* newspaper column. To the astonishment of the Chester Post Office, Herb Farm herb orders came in and herbs went out to locations all over the USA.

Elizabeth's passions were not limited to herbs. She brought the same level of energy and creativity to her philanthropic endeavors, The Seeing Eye, the Garden Club, and the Girl Scouts. The Kays were particularly passionate conservationists. They established two environmental centers. In 1960, they donated 150 acres of land to help establish the Pine Jog Environmental Education Center in Palm Beach County, FL. The center hosts over 25,000 students and 750 teachers annually. Starting in 1962, the Kays began donating parts of their 23-acre Hidden River Farm to the Morris County Parks Commission to be used as an environmental center, where "each day would bring a new wonder and challenge to learn." The Elizabeth D. Kay Environmental Center in Chester was dedicated on October 28, 1993 for "the teaching of children and adults in the natural sciences and the appreciation thereof." ■

## Carmen Helmer Smith (1915-2007)

**Dedicated Chester Historian, Educator, and Volunteer**  
By Alison Dahl - Chester Historical Society and Claire Smith Hanson



Carmen was born in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1915. She and her family moved to New Jersey in 1918. Her dedication to teaching and leadership was fledged when she earned Golden Eaglet status, and became a troop leader and trainer in the Plainfield NJ Girl Scout Council. After college, she became a math teacher who taught in Mendham, NJ among other places.

Carmen and her husband Bob Smith were charter members of the Chester Historical Society, incorporated in 1969. Carmen tirelessly researched and compiled the "Survey of Chester Borough" to determine which sites could qualify for placement on the National and State Historic Sites Registries. Her efforts resulted in the addition of the First Congregational Church, the Publick House, the Cooper Mansion, and others to the registers. This involved innumerable trips to the Halls of Records in Morristown and Trenton, and many hours of study.

Her love for and dedication to preserving Chester history shone as she worked with Frances Greenidge to produce *Chester, New Jersey – A Scrapbook of History* (the Bible of Chester history) and with Larry Lowenthal to produce *Chester's Iron Heyday*. She was instrumental in publishing "A Stroll Through the Old Village of Chester, N.J.", led walking tours through downtown, and compiled the Chester "Auto Tour" pamphlet. In 2005 the "Carmen Smith History Room" in the Chester Library was dedicated in her honor.



While serving as CHS President for six years (1982-1988), and Vice President for another six years, Carmen founded The Grist Mill Weavers, teaching children to spin and weave and demonstrating Colonial-era crafts (1998 photo L-R: Kristen Asdal, Annie Rose Asdal, Ashley Asdal, Lindsay Asdal, Carmen, and Marie Ruzicka; each with a different loom). She was recognized as a "Morris County Living Treasure" in 1999, for her inspiration and teaching. Her indefatigable volunteering spanned many Chester and New Jersey organizations throughout her lifetime. She is buried with her husband Robert in Pleasant Hill Cemetery where their headstone reads "Carmen and Bob Smith They Loved Chester".

## Leila Topping (1869-1939)

### Renowned Concert Pianist and Teacher

By Edward Ng – Chester Historical Society



Leila teaching at Elizabeth College Charlotte NC

Leila was born in Chester in 1869, educated at a Massachusetts boarding school, Mt. Holyoke College, and Graceland's Conservatory, where she studied piano and voice culture. A career in teaching followed college. She was Director of Music at a southern women's college and then at Elizabeth College Conservatory of Music in Charlotte, NC. She returned north and had a noted career as a concert pianist, specializing in Russian music. She was known as "the American pianist with the soul of the Slav". Her passion, breadth, and depth of knowledge of Russian music is described in this snippet from the journal *Musical America* (Vol. 33-34, Feb. 21 1921): "Plenty of people have played Russian music, more than a few have even lectured on their impressions of Russia without ever having seen

it; but surely hers is in the last degree a very personal synthesis of scientific knowledge and individual taste."

She performed and lectured extensively in New York and New Jersey. In addition, she was a magazine writer and authored booklets including "Blessed Mission of Sympathy and of Ill-Health". She enjoyed "travel motoring", water sports, and was a nature lover. She was a devoted Presbyterian, advocated for women's suffrage, and was a member of the Woman's Press Club of N.J. (Woman's Who's who of America, A Biographical Dictionary of Contemporary Women of the United States and Canada, 1914-1915).



Leila often received appreciation letters from organizations where she performed. One letter reads, "My dear Miss Topping, Your recent Lecture-Recital of Modern Russian music, presented before the Music Department of our club was one of the most delightful events of this season and I wish to express in the name of the club sincere appreciation for the pleasure you gave us." Norma M. Chaffee, Chairwoman of the Music Dept., Women's Club of Glen Ridge, NJ. April 21, 1920.

Leila Topping was heiress to the Homestead Farm which included her childhood home, Sunnyside, and the Isaac Corwin House, later to become Larison's Turkey Farm Inn. The Historic American Buildings survey reported her as the owner of the Isaac Corwin House in 1939. Frances Greenidge wrote in her 1974 book, *Chester, New Jersey - A Scrapbook of History*, that "Miss Leila Topping is still

remembered with affection in Chester". ■

## Cabin Fever, Finding Kate, & the Chester Railroad Extravaganza

By Edward Ng – Chester Historical Society

The Chester Historical Society hosted a "Cabin Fever Cure" program in February at The Maple Shop at 105 Main St. Originally this was the site of the Luse Tavern, but starting in 1800 and for the next 200+ years a shop and/or post office operated here. Images from left to right: Alison Dahl welcomed guests and gave a short history of the site. The Maple Shop owner, Jon Rybkiewicz, talked about the maple sugaring process and answered numerous questions. Gordon Ward entertained with heartfelt songs and lived up to his billing as "New Jersey's Troubadour". Many thanks to Jon and Melissa Rybkiewicz for sharing their lovely, historic shop with CHS.

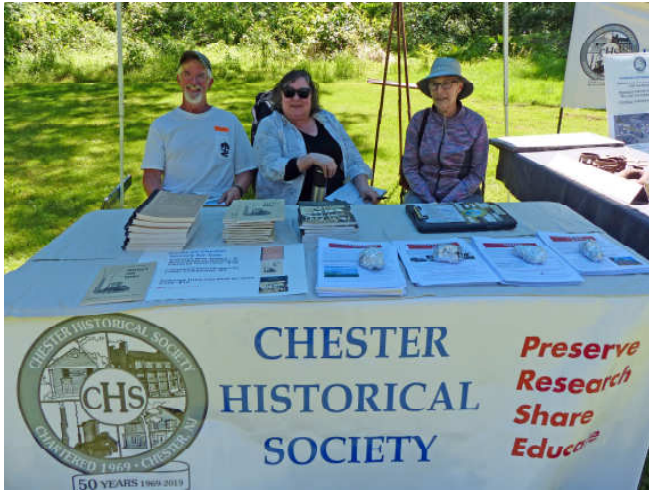


CHS and the Chester Library co-hosted author Meryl Carmel's talk, "Finding Kate, the Unlikely Journey of a 20<sup>th</sup> Century Health Care Advocate, Kate Macy Ladd" based on her book of the same name. The Larison Room at the Chester Library was packed for the talk on March 31, 2019. Meryl's talk illuminated the history of the Ladd family and the development of Natirar as a comfortable recovery refuge for working women. Tea, Hannah's ginger cakes and Chef Fred Trumpy's almond cakes from Natirar recipes were enjoyed, and lively conversation followed Meryl's talk.

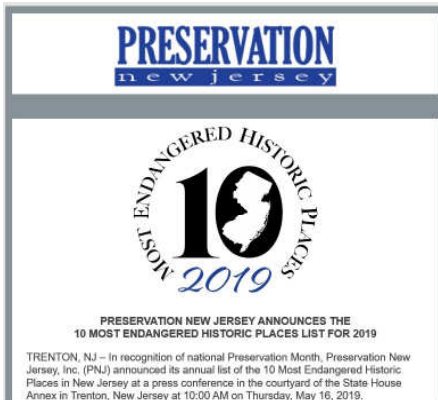




On a lovely Saturday, June 15, 2019 CHS participated in the CHESTER RAILROAD EXTRAVAGANZA organized by the new miller, Samantha Hartford, at the Cooper Gristmill. Bruce Clark, Alison Dahl, and Marla Jackson (left to right, below left) welcomed visitors to the CHS booth to answer questions and distribute newsletters. The CHS display focused on the Chester Furnace and how the network of railroads (Central of New Jersey and the DL&W), linked together the iron mines, the Chester Furnace, and users of their high quality pig iron. ▀



## Isaac Corwin House aka Larison's Turkey Farm Inn Listed on the 10 Most Endangered Historic Places by Preservation New Jersey



Isaac Corwin House  
aka Larison's Turkey Farm  
Borough of Chester, Morris County

In 1829, James Topping, a master cabinetmaker and owner of an iron mine, purchased the circa 1800 Isaac Corwin House and surrounding 53 acres of land in Chester Borough. While under Topping's ownership, the simple farmhouse expanded to become a stately home. In 1945, the house and property were sold to Willis Larison and became "Larison's Turkey Farm Inn." Through its operation as Larison's, it became a well-loved roadside landmark known by both residents and visitors to the region. In the name of meeting the town's affordable housing requirements, however, a developer sued the Chester Borough, who ultimately agreed to the demolition of the Corwin house and another historic structure as part of a settlement. The plight of the Isaac Corwin House is reflective of a larger issue related to the State's refusal to actively manage its obligation to ensure the creation of adequate affordable housing. Without a functioning Council on Affordable Housing office or rules, developers and municipalities are now beholden to the courts to regulate their affordable housing obligations. So long as the State of New Jersey continues to allow the courts to implement affordable housing policy, Preservation New Jersey fears that other historic resources will be at risk of demolition.

Below is background from Preservation New Jersey's website where you will also see the full list of endangered historic sites: (<https://www.preservationnj.org/10-most-2019-press/>)

*The 10 Most Endangered Historic Places program spotlights irreplaceable historic, architectural, cultural, and archaeological resources in New Jersey that are in imminent danger of being lost. The act of listing these resources acknowledges their importance to the heritage of New Jersey and draws attention to the predicaments that endanger their survival and the survival of historic resources statewide. The list, generated from nominations by the public, aims to attract new perspectives and ideas to sites in desperate need of creative solutions.*

We sincerely hope that a new perspective and a creative solution will adaptively reuse the Isaac Corwin House, to benefit the history, culture, and economy of Chester. ▀

## Acknowledgments and Contact Information

**CHS Trustees and Officers:** President – Edward Ng Vice President – John Pfaff  
Treasurer – Anita Rhodes Corresponding Secretary – Lois Taylor  
Recording Secretary- James Whelpley Archives – Edward Ng Programs – Meryl Carmel  
Membership – Alison Dahl Historian – Ed Hanington Elaine Hanington and Marla Jackson

**CHS Newsletter Editor:** - Edward Ng

We thank Lois Taylor for the Cabin Fever images. Historical photos and maps are usually from the CHS archives. Modern photos are by Ed Ng except as noted.

If you would like to join CHS or if you have stories or pictures to share, please talk to a Board member or contact us at (908) 844-6717 or [chester.historical.society@gmail.com](mailto:chester.historical.society@gmail.com), or CHS Box 376 Chester NJ 07930. Membership information and a downloadable membership form are available at <http://historicchesternj.com/home/membership.html> .

### Attributions for Images in the Notable Historic Chester Women articles

1. Janet Abeles:
  - a. Portrait is a scan of the portrait provided by Chester Borough. Thank you.
  - b. Quote at end of the write up is from Observer Tribune, Dec. 12, 1988.
2. Tommie Barker:
  - a. Patch is from the “All-American Girls Professional Baseball League”, 1950.
  - b. Portrait is from the “All-American Girls Professional Baseball League”, 1950.
3. Mae Call:
  - a. Portrait is courtesy of the Call Family, 1949.
  - b. Chester Theatre Group image is courtesy of the Call Family, undated.
4. Martha Brookes Hutcheson:
  - a. Photographic image by Edward Ng of a Jane de Glehn sketch, 1922, loaned by Morris County Parks Commission. Thank you MCPC.
  - b. Digital image of Bamboo Brook sundial and swimming pool by Edward Ng, May 8, 2016.
  - c. Quote is from “Against all Odds – MIT’s Pioneering Women of Landscape Architecture” by Eran Ben-Joseph, Holly D. Ben-Joseph, and Anne C. Dodge. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, School of Architecture and Planning, City Design and Development Group. November 2006.
  - d. Ruth Hill Memoir appeared in the 2010 “The Black River Journal”.
5. Elizabeth Kay:
  - a. Scan of portrait from *New Jersey Country Houses – The Somerset Hills Volume 2* by J.K. Turpin and W.B. Thomson. Mountain Colony Press. 2005. Page 501.
  - b. Scan of illustration from “The Story of the Herb Farm” by Mrs. Alfred G. Kay. Reprinted by the Bulletin of the Garden Clubs of America. Undated. Page 5.
6. Carmen Smith:
  - a. Portrait was extracted from a May 21, 1999 photograph from Claire Hanson.
  - b. July 1998 Grist Mill Weavers annotation from Claire Hanson’s *Carmen Alice Helmer Smith – Her Life in Pictures* page 129. Photo from CHS Archives.
7. Leila Topping: Stylized portrait is from *Musical America (Vol. 33-34, Feb. 26, 1921)*.