



Chester Historical Society's *NEWS & VIEWS* May 2023

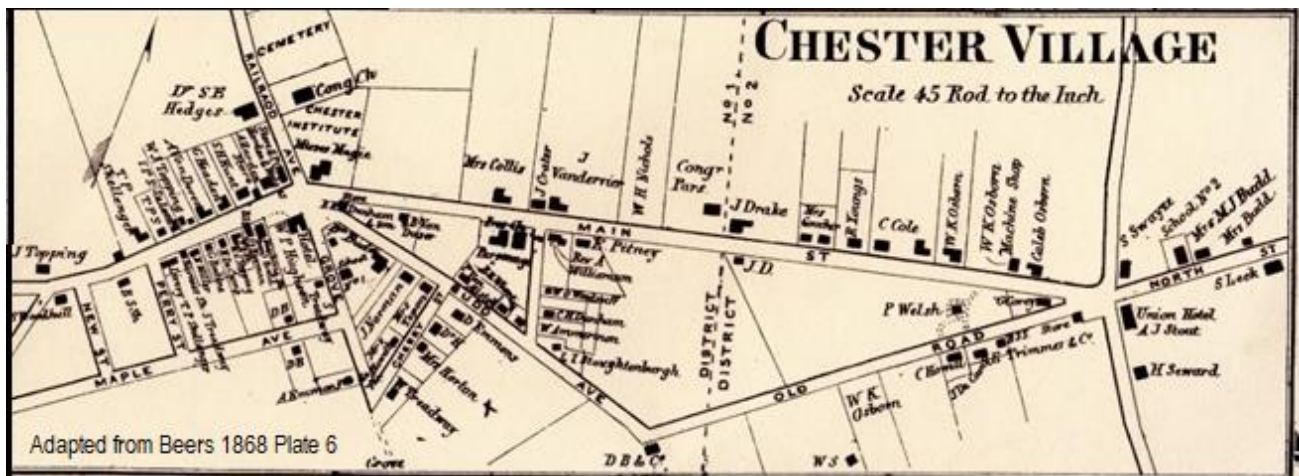
Spring Greetings to Chester Historical Members and Friends. Our mild, relatively snowless winter has ushered in spring with trees and shrubs in glorious bloom and leaf color. Our May 2023 newsletter answers several Chester historical questions: Who is in the “Who’s Who” of 1868? Was Rev. Brewster one of the best sermonizers in New Jersey? Is Chester’s Little Niagara Falls a fantasy? How did “Tommie” Barker get her nickname? What’s going on in the “High Voltage Laboratory”? Enjoy the newsletter. Have a great summer! ■

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Chester Business Directory in the Beers 1868 Atlas by Edward Ng

The CHS Archive has copies of the Beers 1868 Atlas of Morris County¹. On Plate 6 is a map of Chester which includes an inset map of “Chester Village” (shown below) and intriguingly the first known “Business Directory” of Chester with 17 “Businesses” listed next to the map.



¹ F.W. Beers, *Atlas of Morris Co. New Jersey*, A.D. Ellis & G.G. Soule, 1868. The Chester map can be accessed online at: <https://jfp1.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15387coll1/id/23>.
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CHESTER VILLAGE BUSINESS DIRECTORY

J.F. Brewster Pastor of 1st Presbyterian Church
Daniel Budd Iron Manufacturer
N.A. Cooper Farmer & Miller
J.H. Craner Farmer
E.H. Dunham & Son Merchants
J.S. Evans Pastor of 1st Congregational Church
S.E. Heages Physician & Surgeon
S.H. Jackson Miller
P. Karn Merchant
J.B. Mattison Physician & Surgeon
Miss S.C. Magie Prin^{cl} of Young Ladies Institute
Jas. Norman Manu^{fr} of Spokes, Rims, Plows & Castings.
W.H. Nichols Woolen Manu^{fr}
W.K. Osborn Manu^{fr} of Threshers, Cleaners & Horsepowers
L. Skellenger Miller
T.P. Skellenger Livery & Saloon
P. Welsh Resident

1868 was a pivotal year in Chester's history. Starting in 1867 many new iron ore mines would be developed north of Main St. and up North Rd., initiating Chester's iron heyday.² The Business Directory is a snapshot in time of the nature of Chester's pre-iron boom economy. Listed are 4 farmers/millers, 4 manufacturers, 2 pastors, 2 merchants, 2 physicians/ surgeons, 1 livery & saloon keeper, 1 principal of a lady's school, and 1 resident. These humble descriptions belie the fact that many of the folks listed were the movers and shakers of Chester at that time. A good example is "N.A. Cooper Farmer and Miller". This

is General Nathan A. Cooper, owner of the Cooper Mill, other businesses, and a great amount of land in Chester. An exposé on him by CHS was published in 2022³. "T.P. Skellenger Livery & Saloon", is Perry Skellenger, famous for his discovery of the iron seam in his backyard behind Main St. in 1867 which ignited the iron ore boom. This newsletter is starting a series of articles to shed light on the people named in the Business Directory and the nature of their business. The first is J.F. Brewster – "Pastor of 1st Presbyterian Church" (now Community Presbyterian Church). Let us know if you have a favorite person to explore next. ▣

Reverend James F. Brewster (1831-1897) by Peg Hill and Lois Taylor



Rev. Brewster (1858-1890)

The Reverend James Foster Brewster was a descendant of Elder William Brewster, one of the founders of the Plymouth Colony in 1620. He was a graduate of Rutgers College and the Princeton Seminary. In 1858, at the age of 32, he was installed as pastor at the Presbyterian Church in Chester, NJ. One of his parishioners described him as being a "scholarly, genial, consecrated and instructive preacher, an ideal pastor and tireless worker." The church, at that time, had a total of 50 members. Under the

stewardship of Pastor Brewster, that number had increased to 90 by the year 1890. Reverend Brewster always wanted to beautify the church and added the pulpit alcove in 1868 and a large organ on the balcony in 1870. His beautification program included the grounds. He and Theodore Topping planted the maple trees in front of the church which still beautifies the front of the Church.⁴



Community Presbyterian Church and maple tree planted by Rev. Brewster & Theodore Topping. 5/2023 E.Ng

² Larry Lowenthal, *Chester's Iron Heyday*, Chester Historical Society, 1980.

³ Zinnia Cheetham, "The Real Story of General Nathan Cooper," *Chester Historical Society News & Views*, November 2022.

⁴ Verna Rhinehart Allen, *The History of the Community Presbyterian Church 1752-1972*, Community Presbyterian Church, 1972.

Not only was he a gifted pastor, but he was an educator and active participant in the life of the Chester community. He became the superintendent of the "New" Academy on Grove Street from December 1862 to March 1863. The school had a total of 55 students, ranging in age from 4 to 16. Some of the subjects taught were spelling, reading, history, bookkeeping, and arithmetic. Reverend Brewster also conducted a private school in the Church Chapel. Here, he prepared young men for Princeton and other schools. He was also a noted historian and authored the Chester Township chapter in Munsell's History of Morris County.⁵

Reverend Brewster resigned in 1890, due to failing health. He had served for 32 years as a good and faithful servant to his church and community. He and his family retired to Summit, NJ. Frances Greenidge provides a poignant description of his farewell⁶:

When the Rev. James F. Brewster resigned on October 10th after thirty-two years as pastor of the Presbyterian Church "because of failing health," the church members honored Mr. and Mrs. Brewster with a farewell reception in the Chapel. A "great table extending the entire length . . . was freighted with tempting viands, and adorned with floral pieces . . ." The people, to show their great love for their retiring pastor, had collected \$520 which was converted into "thirty-two gold coins - one for each year of Mr. Brewster's ministry."

"Mr. Brewster was called one of the "best sermonizers in New Jersey." Two days later he preached his last one "in the only pulpit" he had "ever called his own." He said, in part: I have given you the labors of a lifetime. This has been my first and only charge. I came to you a boy and I stand here today a gray-haired man with the mere remnants of the flock with which I commenced my ministry.

- four who were members throughout are Mrs. Jane E. Seeley, Mrs. Mary Larrison, Andrew Cregar, and Mrs. Hannah Martenis

- I have received into the membership of the Church 226 persons

- united in marriage 260 persons

- preached 2740 sermons and 240 funeral services

Your firesides are familiar to me by night and day I have been with you as closely in joy as in sorrow, and I could write a history of almost every homeMemory will ever be coming back to these hills . . . and my happiest hours will be those when I can come back. Our friendships will be as lasting as Eternity."

Reverend Brewster died on August 10, 1897, and is buried at Pleasant Hill Cemetery, Chester, along with his wife, Huldah Elizabeth Brewster (1840-1899), their daughter, Elizabeth (1866-1923), and their son, James Chester (1870-1931).

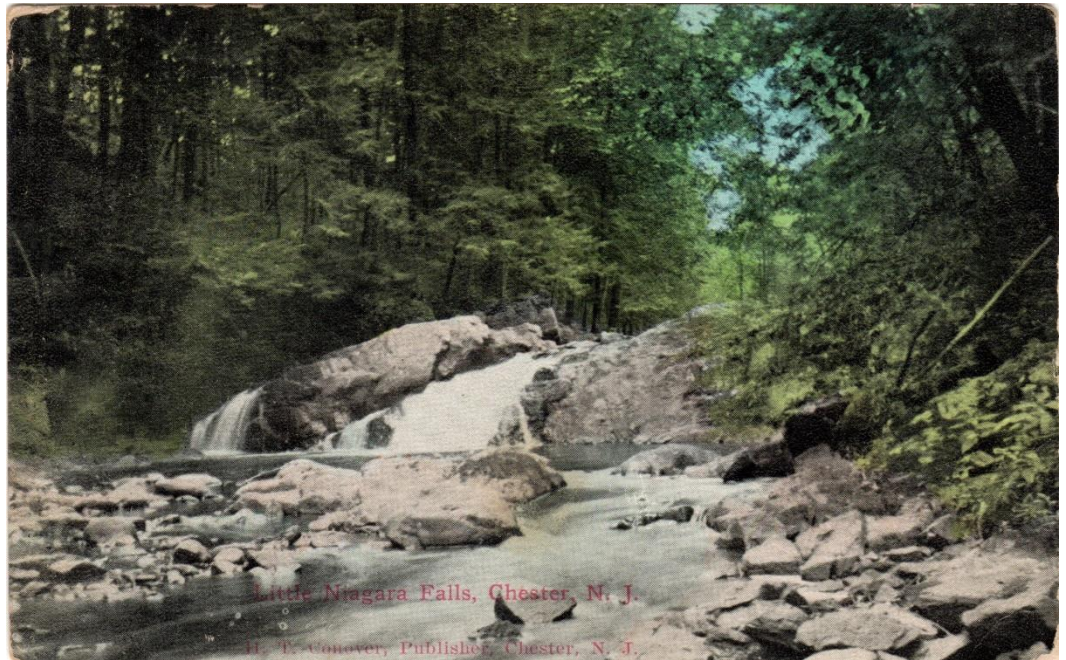
Local lore has it, that to the right of Reverend Brewster's grave is a small monument that is purported to be where the Presbyterian Church was located at one time. His grave is supposed to be where the pulpit was located. ■

⁵ W.W. Munsell, *History of Morris County, New Jersey with Illustrations, and Biographical Sketches of Prominent Citizens and Pioneers*, W.W. Munsell & Co., New York, 1882. Note: also available in the County College of Morris at the Sherman H. Masten Learning Resource Center is his Outline of the History of Morris County.

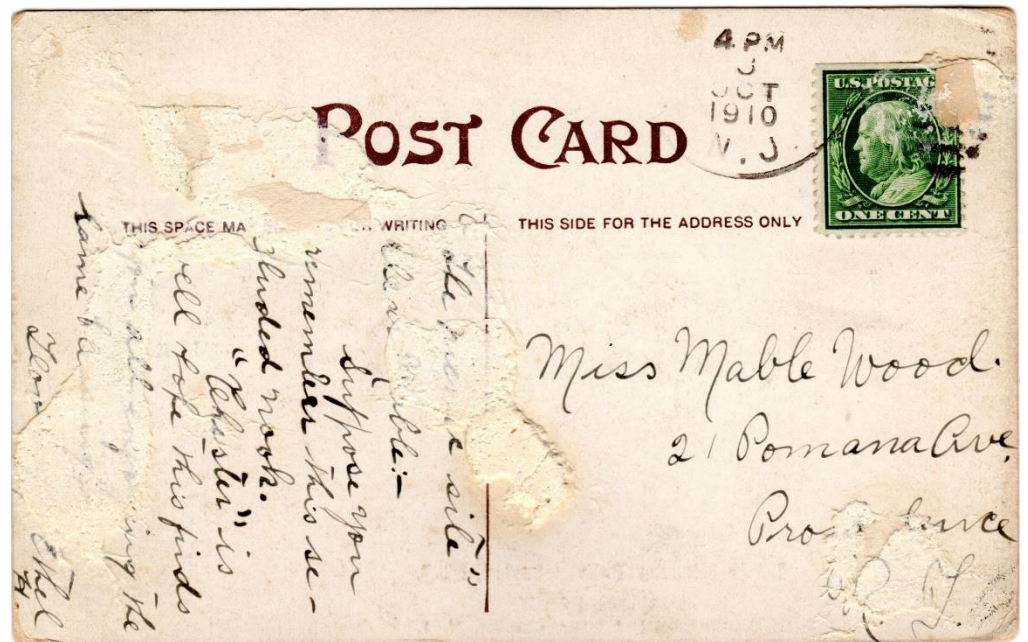
⁶ Frances Greenidge, *Chester, New Jersey – A Scrapbook of History*, Chester Historical Society, 1974, page 111.

Chester's Little Niagara Falls – Myth or Reality? by Edward Ng

Who doesn't love a treasure hunt? Only this time it wasn't gold or jewels, but a lovely waterfall. Zinnia Cheetham, while doing research in the CHS Archives, noticed a pretty postcard in the collection. In faint red ink in the lower part of the postcard, there is an inscription: "Little Niagara Falls, Chester, N.J. and below: H. T. Conover, Chester, N. J." I was intrigued and asked local hiking contacts if they had ever heard of "Little Niagara Falls" in Chester. None did, so the "game was afoot". Some thought it was the Trout Brook waterfall in Hacklebarney State Park, but that waterfall is very different. So where is Little Niagara Falls? Were there clues on the back of the card?



The back of the card showed that it was sent around Oct. 1910 from New Jersey. It was addressed to Miss Mable Wood, 21 Pomana Ave, Providence, R.I. The note was difficult to decipher but Marla Jackson and Alison Dahl suggested that the note read: "The picnic site." "Dear Mable:- Suppose you remember this secluded nook. "Chester" is swell. Hope this finds you all enjoying the same blessings. Love you Ethel H. " There are a couple of possible mis-spellings on the card: "Mabel" instead of "Mable" and "Pomona" instead of "Pomana". I will use Mabel and Pomona.

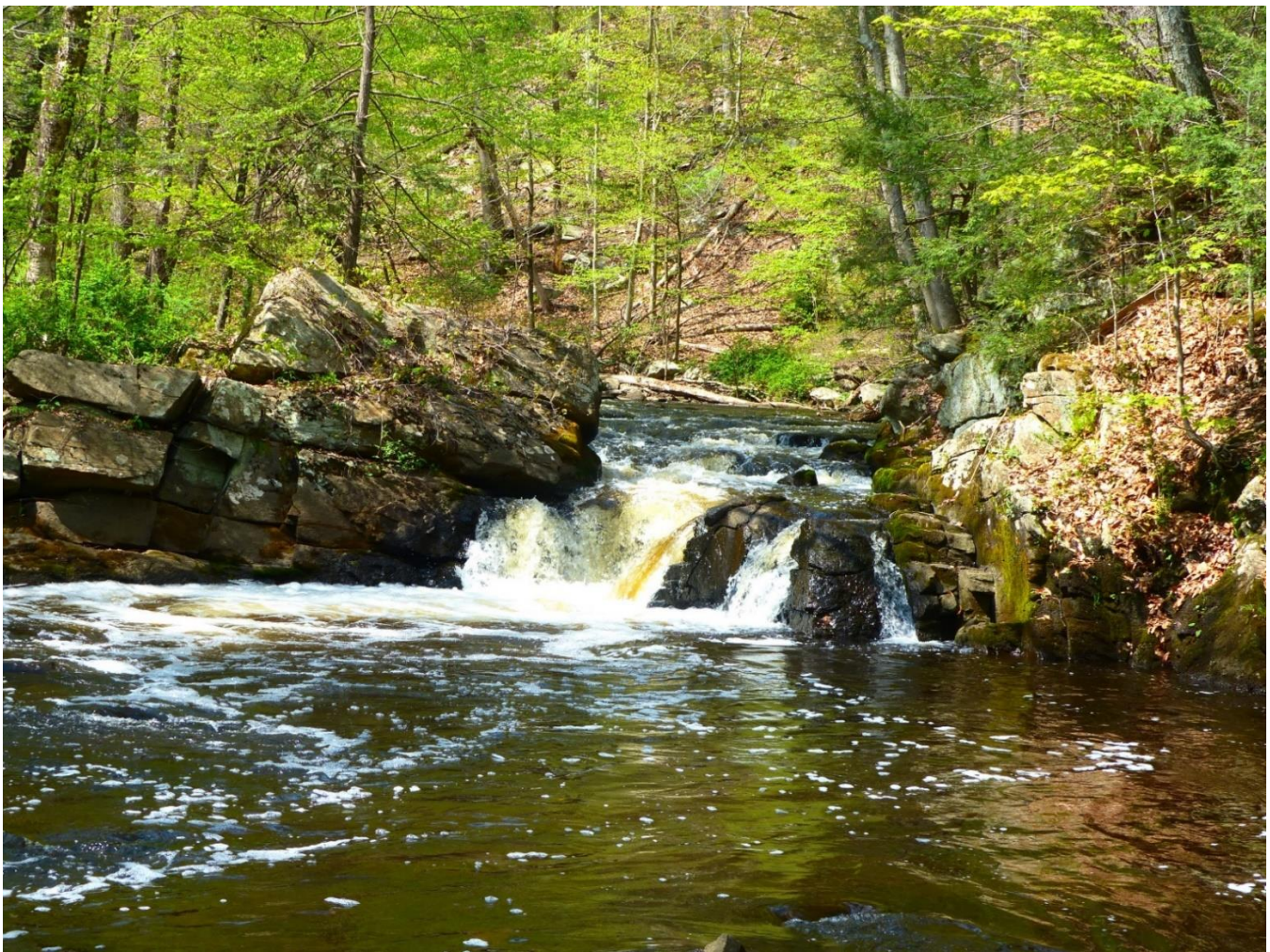


I am not sure who Mabel and Ethel are, however, the publisher Herbert T. Conover (1886-1980) was a documentarian of Chester. Like his father, George E. Conover (1864-1942), he published many postcards with scenes of Chester. George ran a general store at 87 Main St.

He published the *Conover Cash Store News* and Herbert wrote the Chester History column. George and Herbert's published postcards had scenes from all over Chester so there is no hint where Little Niagara Falls could be.

A search of the Chester Archives turned up helpful clues. The archives contained other copies of the postcard. There was also a photo (which may have been of a postcard) titled "Little Niagara Waterfall Black River NJ" with additional information: "near Upper Hacklebarney." Another card had the notation: "*Little Niagara* – Black River -behind the Page house on Hacklebarney Rd." With the help of Lois Taylor and former Township Mayor Ken Caro, we were able to locate the Page house and the possible location of the falls.

One hundred and thirteen years after Ethel sent her card to Mabel, I hiked beyond the end of the trail along the Black River in Hacklebarney State Park and spied their secluded nook. Looking at the postcard and images I captured, there are differences. I was there in spring and the postcard photo was likely taken in the summer. The river level is lower in the postcard so more of the rocks can be seen. The river's channel over the falls has shifted slightly eastward but it was a close match to the postcard. With scenery like Little Niagara Falls on the Black River, Ethel was right "Chester is swell" - in 1910 and 2023. ■



Editors Note: 2024 is the centennial of the founding of Hacklebarney State Park which we will commemorate in an upcoming article. Little Niagara Falls will be part of the story.

Hall of Famer Tommie Barker - Her Life In Her Own Words by Edward Ng

On April 7, 1923, Lois Barker was born. On November 5, 1988, Lois "Tommie" Barker and her All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL)⁷ teammates were inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. How did she go from Chester to Cooperstown? Fortunately, we have many interviews and stories about Tommie to help us bridge that 65-year gap. In her own words and those who interviewed Tommie, here is her story.

One of the interviewers, Christine K. Fillimon, asked her why her nickname was Tommie when her given name was Lois. *"Well, that's a funny story," she said. "I came from a family of nine children. Before I was born my parents had 7 girls and only 1 boy. Mom was hoping for another son and had the name Thomas Charles all picked out. Of course, when I came along, that name went by the wayside. My older brother and my sisters have told me that every time they would look into the cradle they would say, 'There's our Tommie' and the name just sort of stuck."*⁸



Tommie and her two brothers. Image courtesy of the Chester Library.



Tommie in front of the Honor Roll sign on Main St. Image courtesy of the Chester Library. Undated

Sandy Seegers reported on her early ambitions. *"When I was five or six, I dreamed of being a professional ballplayer. I never thought it was possible since I was female. It was one of my greatest accomplishments."*⁹

Greg Hatala reported on how she became a ballplayer: *"Barker grew up in Chester with six sisters and two brothers, and she recalled watching her father coach local baseball teams; she also remembered catching batting practice for a local men's team when she was 8 years old. After graduating from Roxbury High School, where she lettered in softball, she began playing in local softball leagues and tournaments"*¹⁰.

Lois "Tommie" Barker wasn't going to let an opportunity to play professional baseball pass her by. Tommie told the lie of her life. *"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."*¹¹ *"But, I guess God was saying 'Tommie go for it!'"*¹²

⁷ More information on the history of the AAGPBL is at <https://www.aagpbl.org/history/league-history>. The League operated from 1943-1954. In 1948, their best year, paid attendance was 910,000 from 10 teams. Over 600 women were members of the AAGPBL.

⁸ Christine Fillimon, "The love of the game endures," *The Black River Journal*, Winter 2004.

⁹ Sandy Seegers, "Chester's 'Tommie' Barker finds niche in Cooperstown. Hall of Fame exhibit honors women players.," *Daily Record*, November 6, 1988.

¹⁰ Greg Hatala, "Glimpse of History: In a league of her own," *Star Ledger*, March 11, 2013.

¹¹ Sandy Seegers, "Baseball's their dream of a lifetime," *Daily Record*, May 31, 1998.

¹² Lois Anna 'Tommie' Barker Career Highlights on Rookie Card, A.A.G.P.L Cards, 1990.



LOIS (TOMMY) BARKER

In 1949 a local newspaper reported, "Miss Barker, a graduate of Roxbury High School, has played with the Dover Softball team and more recently with the Chester Farmerettes, who won the Morris-Somerset County championship. On May 1 she went in for the tryouts at Chancellor Park in Irvington resulting in the contract she just obtained."¹³

The Newark News reported, "Lois (Tommy) Barker today is on her way to Chicago, having given up hefting groceries in a small-town store to hefting a bat in big-time baseball. The 26-year-old Chester Farmerettes outfielder and home run specialist has been given a contract to play professionally in the All-America Baseball League in the Midwest. Miss Barker,



5-3 and 125 pounds of athletic energy, has been in sports all her life. She started with football in the Fall and graduated to baseball in the Summer with the boys as soon as she was old enough to run."¹⁴

Tommie reminisced about the tryouts at Chancellor Field in Irvington, "Whether you were a star or a mediocre player, you had to be good enough to get there."¹⁵ There were 120 girls at the tryouts and Tommie was one of the 15 selected to go to rookie school. Tommie did well at rookie school and received a contract, but homesickness almost derailed her pro baseball career:

"Believe me, there were a lot of good ball players at the tryouts and later at rookie school. Some girls made it and some didn't. I was lucky. The League offered me railroad tickets to South Bend, Indiana where rookie school was held and a chance for a contract waited. If you made it through rookie school, you were signed up and handed over to a team. I made it and was listed to spring train with the Fort Wayne Daisies, but when I got out there I was so homesick. I telegraphed my Dad and said, 'Send me some money, I'm coming home!' A few weeks later before Dad could wire the money, I was transferred to the Chicks in Grand Rapids.

The atmosphere in Michigan was completely different. The girls were friendlier and Coach Rawlings, who once played second base for the New York Giants, seemed, I don't know, more nurturing than the guy in Fort Wayne. The host family I was matched with in Michigan was an elderly couple and it was just like going home for me. My homesickness disappeared."¹⁶ Her new family in Grand Rapids was Anna Ackerman and her family. "Mrs. Ackerman was like a mother to me. I was a farm town kid who'd never been away from home, then ended up in the big city. Mrs. Ackerman cooked all our meals and did our dirty laundry."¹⁷

¹³ "Chester Girl on All American Girls' Ball Team at Chicago," unknown newspaper, May 27, 1949.

¹⁴ Diamond Star. Newark News, May 29, 1949.

¹⁵ Chester's 'Tommie' Barker finds niche in Cooperstown. Hall of Fame exhibit honors women players," Daily Record, November 6, 1988.

¹⁶ Fillimon, "The love of the game endures,"

¹⁷ Seegers, "Chester's 'Tommie' Barker finds niche in Cooperstown."

In 1950 there were eight teams in AAGPBL. In addition to the Grand Rapids Chicks, there were the Rockford Peaches, Kenosha Comets, Fort Wayne Daisies, South Bend Blue Sox, Racine Belles, Peoria Redwings, and the Kalamazoo Lassies. *"We played a schedule of one-hundred and twenty-five games. The year I played with the Chicks, our team qualified for the playoffs; we lost in the first round, but it was a real thrill for me to make it that far. If there wasn't a minor league park in the city where we were scheduled to play, we would use a high school field or recreational field, as long as the field had lights; the only day games we played were doubleheaders on Sundays."*¹⁸

The Chicks traveled between cities by bus. *"I liked the bus trips, though they were long. The girls played cards, sang, hooted, hollered and yelled, probably just like the men. You could wear shorts or slacks on the bus, but when you got off, you had to wear skirts. The owners wanted us to be lady-like. ... It was really tough sliding with those uniforms. It seems like you went through the whole season" with strawberries' on your legs).*¹⁹ See the image to the right.²⁰



Rockford Peaches chaprone Dotie Green attends to a "strawberry" on leg of player Lois Florreich. Jack Fincher, "The 'Belles of the Ball Game' were a hit with their fans," *Smithsonian Magazine* Vol 20 #4 July 1989.



1950 Lois 'Tommie' Barker - Grand Rapids Chicks - A-A GPBL signed *With all my love - God bless you - Always - Lois* CHS Archives

Tommie played third base and right field for the Chicks. In one of her first games, she was in right field and suffered a not-infrequent, but still very embarrassing error. *"I had never played under lights before. Somebody hit a fly ball to me, and I had it all the way, but at the last moment, I lost it in the lights and it hit me on an ear. I thought that was the end of my career — one game and out — but when I got back to the dugout, Johnny Rawlings, our manager, told me to forget it, that it happens to everybody."*²¹

In the 32 games she played, that was the only error she made and she had a stellar .944 fielding percentage. However, according to the statistics from the AAGPBL, Tommie was not an offensive force and only batted .125. She did keep slugging for the fences but struck out 15 times in 64 at-bats. Though very much at home in the ballpark, she was not used to playing in front of packed viewing stands with 6,000 or more people. *"I was nervous. I was standing in the field wondering 'Is this really me?'. It was normal to have apprehensions."*²²

Tommie had kind words about her manager, *"Johnny Rawlings was a great old guy. He was all business – firm but compassionate. He was always there if you*



John Rawlings - Grand Rapids Chicks Manager <https://collection.baseballhall.org>

¹⁸ Fillimon, "The love of the game endures."

¹⁹ Ron Panko, "Hall of famer in a league of her own," *The Observer Tribune*, February 18, 1993.

²⁰ Jack Fincher, "The 'Belles of the Ball Game' were a hit with their fans," *Smithsonian Magazine*, July 1989.

²¹ Panko, "Hall of famer in a league of her own."

²² Seegers, "Chester's 'Tommie' Barker finds niche in Cooperstown."

had a problem."²³ Johnny Rawlings (1892-1972) was a journeyman big league ballplayer. He played for the Cincinnati Reds (1914), Kansas City Packers of the Federal League (1914-1915), Boston Braves (1917-1920), Philadelphia Phillies (1920-1921), New York Giants (1921-1922), and the Pittsburgh Pirates (1923-1926) as a second baseman and shortstop. He coached the Chicks and later the Rockford Peaches.²⁴ If it wasn't for Rawlings' compassion and understanding, Tommie's pro career may have ended with homesickness and/or an embarrassing hit in the head by a ball in right field. Rawlings was close in age to Tommie's father and that may have been a comforting factor.

In addition to the manager, each team had a chaperone who "protected the morals of the players at home as well as on the road. The girls were officially forbidden to drink, gamble, violate curfew, wear shorts or slacks in public, or go out on dates alone without permission and an interview of the prospective swain."²⁵ "Our team's chaperone was Dorothy Hunter; you couldn't do anything without her approval. Besides keeping an eye on us, she was responsible for each girl's living arrangements in the team's home city. The ideal housing, as far as the League was concerned, was for the girls to stay with families, as I did. Some of the girls pulled together and rented a small apartment, but only with Dorothy's seal of approval."²⁶

Overall, Tommie enjoyed her teammates. "The best things about being in the league were friends and the camaraderie. I developed many friendships along the way."²⁷ Tommie leads off a montage of the Grand Rapids Chicks team photo, including the manager and the chaperone.

1950 GRAND RAPIDS CHICKS

PLAYERS, MANAGERS, COACHES & CHAPERONES



Images Courtesy of
AAGPBL
<http://aagpbl.org/teams/grand-rapids-chicks/1950>

²³ Seegers, "Chester's 'Tommie' Barker finds a niche in Cooperstown."

²⁴ "Rawlings, Johnny - 1892-1972 Biographical/Historical Information," accessed May 26, 2023. <https://collection.baseballhall.org/people/25230/rawlings-johnny-1892-1972/objects>

²⁵ Fillmon, "The love of the game endures."

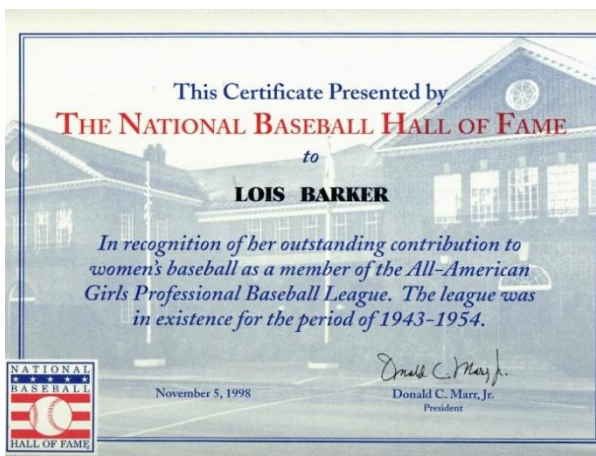
²⁶ Fillmon, "The love of the game endures."

²⁷ Panko, "Hall of famer in a league of her own."

The 1950 season ended with the Chicks in fourth place with a respectable 59-win and 53-loss season. They made the playoffs despite losing their first 21 games. Even though they lost the playoffs in the first round, it was a good season. Tommie was offered a contract for the 1951 season but had to decline due to her widowed father's illness²⁸. Having only played one season, Tommie would say she would always be a rookie²⁹. The AAGPBL stopped play in 1954 as WWII and the Korean War ended, and the men's leagues resumed.

Tommie returned to Chester to care for her father but kept playing amateur ball until her knees gave out. She played in the Middle Atlantic Softball League, retiring at 38 years of age. She explained with her usual humor: "Quitting when I had to hit a home run to get to first base."³⁰ Even after retiring, she continued to actively promote baseball and encourage players. When giving her signature to young girls, she took care to write a personal message or say "Hope this inspires you to continue with athletics."³¹

Though the AAGPBL folded, many of the elite players continued touring and playing in All-Star games throughout the Midwest.³² After much hard work, the first reunion of AAGPBL players was held in Chicago in 1982. A second reunion was held in Fort Wayne four years later. Encouraged by the success of the reunions and the camaraderie, members launched a lobbying campaign to convince the Baseball Hall of Fame to create a special exhibit on the AAGPBL's contributions to baseball. Those organized efforts succeeded and on November 5, 1988, an exhibit honoring women in baseball and highlighting the AAGPBL opened at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown.³³ In 1992 the AAGPBL Museum was established there to preserve the history of the League and is open to the public.³⁴



Tommie was present and honored at the November 1988 inauguration of the AAGPBL exhibit. "I never, ever dreamed the Hall of Fame would be a reality. After 34 years, it's an impossible dream fulfilled."³⁵ "We're pinching ourselves to see if it's real. This is a once-in-a-lifetime event. The Good Book says good things come to those who wait. And, we all did our waiting. It was an honor back then to be considered to sign a contract and this is an honor, too. There were so few people involved with it."³⁶ "There were maybe 500 players during the life of the league, and everybody's in. It was either everybody or nobody."³⁷ I was good enough to be there, and no one, anywhere, anytime can ever take that honor or privilege away."³⁸

²⁸ Tommie's father was Harry E. Barker 1882-1955. Her mother was Nora Jane (Simons) Barker 1884-1933.

²⁹ Seegers, "Chester's 'Tommie' Barker finds niche in Cooperstown."

³⁰ Panko, "Hall of famer in a league of her own."

³¹ Sandy Seegers, "Memories Go Into Extra Innings. Baseball movie 'accurate'," *Daily Record*, July 7, 1997.

³² "Women's baseball continued long after AAGPBL ended," accessed May 27, 2023, <https://baseballhall.org/discover-more/stories/short-stops/womens-baseball-history>

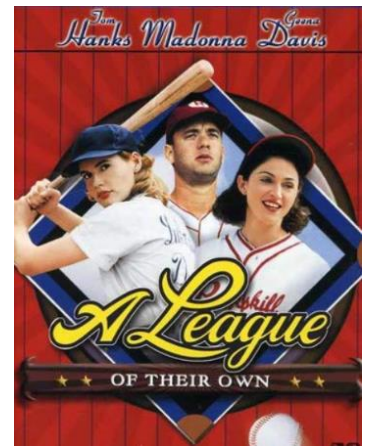
³³ Fincher, "The 'Belles of the Ball Game' were a hit with their fans."

³⁴ "The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League: A History." Accessed May 27, 2023 <https://www.arnabontempmuseum.com/the-all-american-girls-professional-baseball-league-a-history/>

³⁵ Carrie Stetler, "Chester Borough Gal to join the Babe," *The Observer Tribune*, November 3, 1988.

³⁶ Seegers, "Chester's Tommie Barker finds a niche in Cooperstown."

Tommie and the AAGPBL's fame ramped up in 1992 with the release of the hit film *A League of Their Own*, which grossed \$133 million at the box office. The movie was directed by Penny Marshall (Laverne of the TV hit show *Laverne & Shirley*) and there was a star-studded ensemble cast led by Geena Davis, Tom Hanks, and Madonna. The film follows the exploits of Davis' character, Dottie Hinson, through try-outs to the playoffs to the Hall of Fame with the Peoria Peaches which parallels Tommie's progression with the Chicks³⁹. Though there were major differences and one of them, the addition of Madonna to the cast did not sit well with Tommie. *"Madonna's so far from the image the league projected. I kept telling all my friends to watch because they'd never see her with that many clothes on again"*. However, after seeing her in the movie where she behaved respectably and played with skill, Tommie changed her mind. *"I guess I owe her an apology. She did a good job and looked like she could really play ball. The movie was outstanding. I really enjoyed it. It brought back so many memories for me. Everything was pretty accurate – the uniforms, the ballparks, charm school, the actual playing."*⁴⁰



The November 5, 1988 ceremony in Cooperstown, recognizing the contributions of the AAGPBL was reenacted in the movie. *"The end was the best. I was there. I remember it. Being acknowledged by the Hall of Fame was a dream come true, just like getting the opportunity to play. For a while, we thought we'd never live to see our day in Cooperstown."*⁴¹



At the age of 94, Tommie passed away on February 14, 2018. She had been the subject of many news articles, the Chester Historical Society's recognition as one of the "Seven Notable Historic Chester Women,"⁴² an ongoing exhibit in the Chester Library, and of course, the Baseball Hall of Fame recognition⁴³. Tommie's generosity of spirit and friendliness were well-known and appreciated. After she passed her generosity of support for Chester institutions on a monetary basis was revealed. In her will, she left the Chester Cemetery Association, the Chester Volunteer Fire Company, the Chester First Aid Squad, and Chester Township/Borough Recreation, over \$200,000 to each group to support their programs. In recognition of her generosity and achievements, Chester Township will dedicate the Lois Anna "Tommie" Barker Field in Chubb Park this year. The inauguration date and time are to be announced.

When Tommie was 5 or 6, she wanted to be a professional ballplayer. She never dreamed it would happen because she was a girl, but she worked hard, took her chances, and succeeded. I think she would want her story to inspire all young athletes, especially girls, to pursue their sports dreams and fulfill them as much as possible. Just like Tommie did.

³⁷ Panko, "Hall of Famer in a league of her own."

³⁸ Stetler, "Chester Borough Gal to join the Babe."

³⁹ A League of Their Own. (2023, May 12). In *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_League_of_Their_Own

⁴⁰ Seegers, "Memories go into extra innings. Baseball movie accurate."

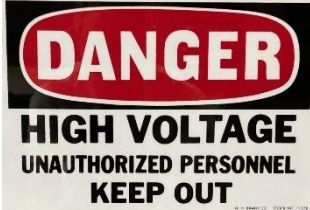
⁴¹ Seegers, "Memories go into extra innings. Baseball movie accurate."

⁴² Deb Schiff, "Lois Ann 'Tommie' Barker 1923-2018, Professional Womens Baseball Player," *Chester Historical Society News & Views*, June 2019.

⁴³Image of Lois Barker (Tommie) accessed May 29, 2023, <http://aagpbl.org/profiles/lois-barker-tommie/262>.

The CHS Archives Got a Makeover! by Alison Dahl

It wasn't pretty, to begin with. The big 34' X 25' X 10' room originally served as the AT&T Bell Labs "High Voltage Laboratory" in their facility in Chester. Thus, an ominous DANGER! sign graces the entry door, now welcoming and warning all who dare to enter the CHS Archives.



Needless to say, it was apparent the Bell Labs engineers and scientists had little interest in aesthetics. There wasn't much



architecture to appreciate, charm to preserve, or any special features to enhance. Our renovation goal was to produce a bright, clean, efficiently-organized space in which CHS archivists, Chester history researchers, CHS members, and guests could work comfortably.



Since settling into the Chester Township facility at 100 North Road in 2008, a handful of dedicated CHS member volunteers have worked diligently in rather spartan surroundings, to bring sense and order and to preserve the thousands of photos, news clippings, artifacts, and all of the Chester-related historical records and documents the Society's been collecting since 1969.

Before the COVID pandemic, CHS archivists met every Friday morning over the last ten years creating a searchable database of every item in the archives. We had to scootch around an array of mismatched furniture, find a sturdy chair, and stake a claim to a makeshift work area. Then during the COVID shutdown, the Archives remained in a state of suspended animation. The dust settled, cobwebs abounded, and bugs enjoyed two years of undisturbed peace.



This hiatus made the task more daunting. To clear the room for painting and new flooring, the 140+ banker and acid-free file boxes, several very heavy metal map files, metal shelving, and many filing cabinets had to be moved across the hall to a temporary staging

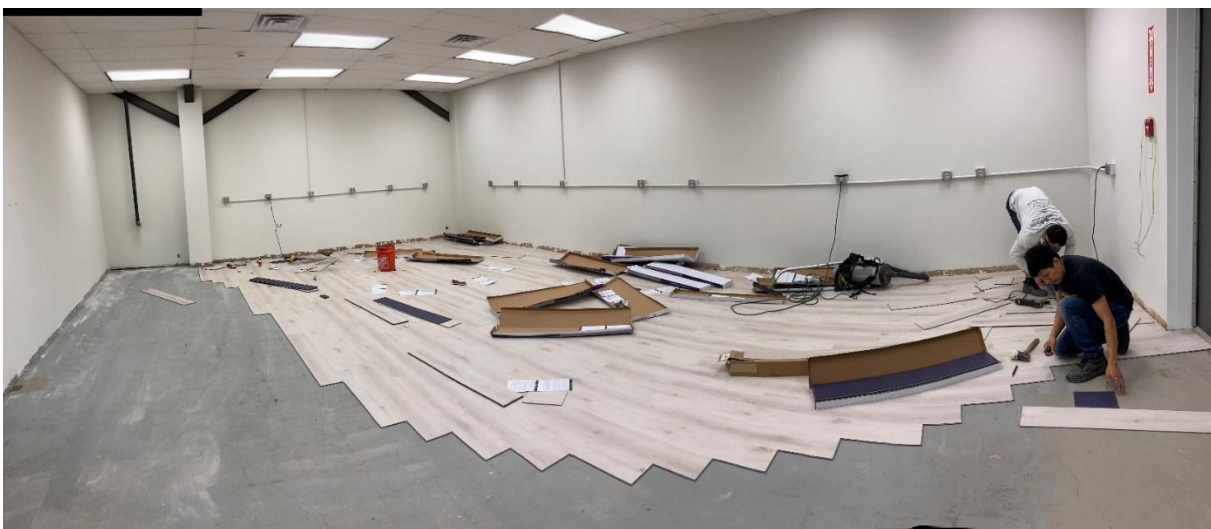


room. The College Hunks (left) had everything moved out in a day leaving the cleared room.

A big part of the project was to assemble 16 stainless steel rolling shelving units, then transfer all of the file boxes in numeric order to the shelves. Thanks to Ed Ng and Joe Sullivan, the task was accomplished! Once the room was cleared, we said “bye-bye” to the bugs, dust, cobwebs, and assorted foreign particles so the room was cleaner and clear for the painters. The Monk’s painters came, sanded, spackled, sanded some more, and then painted. They did a very nice job – except the floor was left with too much spackle dust in the vinyl-tile floor installers’ judgment. So we mopped the concrete floors (shown below).



After the deck was swabbed, the Harty Brothers flooring crew (shown below) installed the new vinyl tile -- they, too, did a very nice job. The Chester Township Department of Public Works followed up and cleaned all of the fluorescent light ceiling panels and replaced defunct light tubes. It was beautiful to behold – fresh and bright as planned!



Time to roll the 140+ archives boxes back on the stainless steel shelves – but not before Lois Taylor, Peg Hill, and Alison Dahl dusted every box and shelf and then rolled them back into place in the new room. The College Hunks followed and hefted all the heavy metal files and cabinets and furniture back into the room according to the new floor plan – what a job!

Thanks to all the stalwart CHS volunteers who helped! And thanks to College Hunks, Monk’s Home Improvements, Harty Brothers, and Chester Township DPW for their good work helping

to bring our vision to reality. Thanks to all the CHS Members who voted to expend funds for the renovation which came in on budget.



COMING SOON! We're planning a grand re-opening celebration of the CHS Archives! Chester Historical Society members and guests will be invited to see the new facility, enjoy a CHS exhibit and talk at the Highlands Ridge Barn and then tour the Telephone Pole Farm. STAY TUNED for the details and your invitation.

If you are interested in becoming a CHS Archives volunteer, please send an email to Alison Dahl at chester.historical.society@gmail.com or leave a message at 908 866-6717. We plan to begin meeting again in late June, one half-day per week, details to be announced. There is a lot to do, and it's fun and educational – please join us in our new workspace!

May 2023 The Pathways of History and Rockefeller Center Open House by E.Ng



CHS participated in Morris County's Pathways of History on May 7. The Rockefeller Open House had information on the history and future of the building and the Chester Furnace



Historic Site. Almost 50 guests came to view the exhibits. Thanks to Meg Sullivan for helping me welcome curious history buffs to the Open House.

Acknowledgments and Contact Information

CHS is a 501(c)3 Nonprofit Organization – please remember us when you make your annual charitable donations and in your legacy planning. Donations are fully tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. **CHS Trustees and Officers:** President – Edward Ng Vice President – John Pfaff Treasurer – Anita Rhodes Corresponding Secretary – Lois Taylor Recording Secretary- Marla Jackson Archives – Alison Dahl Programs – Vacant Membership – Vacant Trustees – Ed and Elaine Hanington, Meg Sullivan **Newsletter Editor:** Edward Ng 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, or CHS Box 376 Chester NJ 07930. Membership information and a membership form are available at <http://historicchesternj.com/home/membership.html>.