



# The Chester Historical Society's News & Views

Summer 2011



Preservation ~ Information ~ Education [www.HistoricChesterNJ.com](http://www.HistoricChesterNJ.com)

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## SEE YOU AT OUR SUMMER PICNIC!

Our annual Chester Historical Society Summer Picnic will be held on Sunday, August 14th from noon to 4 p.m. at the beautiful Willowwood Arboretum in Chester. All CHS members will receive invitations, directions, details, and reservation forms in the mail in mid-July. The Stone Barn at Willowwood will provide shade and shelter from the elements if it's rainy, and members' delicious side dishes and desserts will complement the picnic ham and brisket for a splendid repast. Enjoy a self-guided walking tour around the historic gardens, too. We look forward to seeing everybody -- it's always a pleasant event.



## Summer Reading Extended to September 15th

Great news -- we have more time to complete our summer reading assignment! Our CHS **book review program** originally scheduled for July 14th has been postponed to September 15th. All who attend the program are asked to help review pages 25 through 70 of Frances Greenidge's "Chester, New Jersey -- a Scrapbook of History" (see related article). We will meet on Thursday, September 15th at 7 p.m. at the Chester Library. When we last left off (on page 25), we learned about the Native American Indians who lived here, about the early settlers who came from England via the Hamptons on Long Island, and about some of the prominent folks in and around Black River, which later became known as Chester.



Readers are asked to make notes of any additional facts or lore they may have in reference to the "Scrapbook" information, and to identify current street addresses and house numbers whenever possible so that the data can be updated and refined. Oftentimes, an historic reference is identified as "the Caleb Horton farm on South Road," for example. If the current address is known, we would like to state this for future updates to the "Scrapbook" -- so please, contribute any supplemental information you may have. In between facts, we love reminiscing, and folklore, too.

Our "Scrapbook" reviews will continue when we meet on **October 13**, and **November 10th** at 7 p.m. at the Chester Library. Each of our review sessions is being recorded so that all of your contributions can be enjoyed and incorporated into the updated "Scrapbook." Copies of the "Scrapbook" may be obtained by contacting Alison Dahl, 908 879-7673, and are \$15 each if picked up in person, \$20 each if mailed. If you'd like to skip the reading and just learn about Chester history by attending the program, by all means **join us!** All are welcome and refreshments will be served.

## 113 Gigabytes of the *Observer Tribune*

contributed by Edward Ng

A recent addition to the Chester Library is a computer dedicated to searching the *Observer-Tribune*. In a corner of the Carmen Smith History Room, the Chester Historical Society has set up a PC with files of the *Observer-Tribune* from Jan. 6, 1955 to Dec. 24, 2009.

In 2010 with support from the Chester Library, the Historical Society's bound copies of the *Observer-Tribune* were scanned into searchable files. Each of the 2800 files are readable and searchable using Acrobat Reader. Search results can be copied to a Word File then saved to a researcher's USB drive.

The *Observer-Tribune* is also searchable from the public PC's in the library. However, since the files are stored on a shared server, searching is slower than on the PC in the Carmen Smith History Room.

The accompanying photo shows Chester Township Historian, Len Taylor, accessing the *Observer-Tribune* archives on the dedicated PC in the History Room.



### Chester Furnace Tour—Rescheduled for the Fall

We got rained out for Township Historian Len Taylor's Furnace Tour in May, so stay tuned for the new date this Fall, when we can enjoy the autumnal palette, Len's breadth and depth of knowledge about Chester's Iron Heyday, and a walk in the woods.

### Travel + History = Memorable Vacations

Take a short detour to the **North Carolina Museum of History** in downtown Raleigh next time you're driving down Route 95. This museum was a favorite destination when we were visiting our daughter at nearby Duke University. Located right in downtown Raleigh, steps from the capital building, this museum is worth your time.



The **Thomas Day, Cabinetmaker** exhibit is first rate, showcasing a wide range of furniture produced from 1835 to 1860. Mr.

Day was a free man of color who owned and operated one of North Carolina's largest cabinet shops prior to the Civil War. An upcoming exhibit is the **Cherokee Carvers: Tradition Renewed** from the Asheville Art Museum running through Nov. 30th.

If you have a **favorite history spot** you've encountered on your travels, send it along: Marcia.asdal@gmail.com or 76 Route 24, Chester.

# Revisiting Frances Greenidge's CHESTER, NEW JERSEY A Scrapbook of History 1713-1971

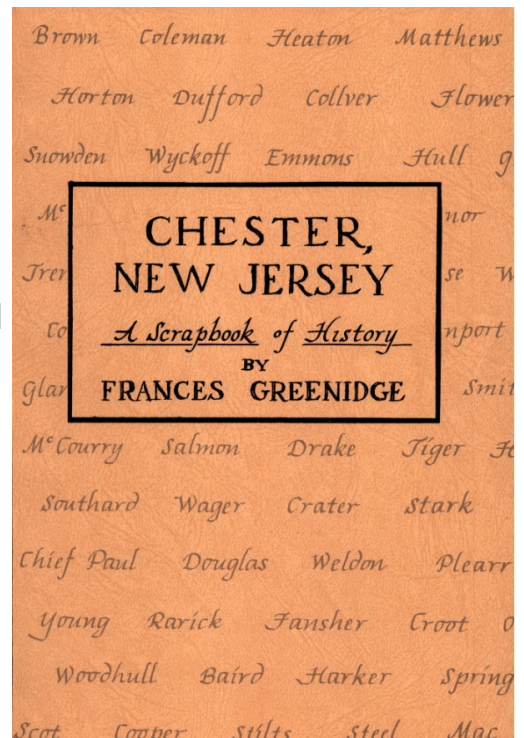
Contributed by Edward Ng

The definitive book about Chester history was published in 1974. Frances Greenidge interviewed or corresponded with over a hundred people with links to Chester starting in 1971 and continued for 5 years. She also accessed innumerable personal papers to be found in the Chester, Morris County, and New Jersey State archives. In her own words, "This work is called a "SCRAPBOOK OF HISTORY" because that is what it is – a collection of widely gathered "scraps" of information and memories pieced together in order to preserve a historical picture of Chester, once an important New Jersey crossroads." It is this personal perspective that Frances Greenidge gave the book that has endeared it to many readers.

Forty years after she started her work, the Chester Historical Society will conduct a reading of the book over several programs. The goals are to enjoy Greenidge's observations, share insights, add new information, and make corrections as needed. Our goal is not to do A Scrapbook rewrite but to add information which would make the history more readable and relevant. Examples of two such goals are to create a more detailed map than what is in the book and to add addresses to the many landmarks that she mentions.

In the first program, March 10, President Alison Dahl led about 40 audience members from the last ice age - not too many audience comments- to Chester in the period just before the Revolutionary War -that elicited many comments, corrections, and anecdotes of the places and people mentioned in the book. If you missed the first program and would like to see a video of the program (interesting but not Academy Award quality), email [chester.historical.society@gmail.com](mailto:chester.historical.society@gmail.com) to borrow a DVD.

The second program will take place on September 15th, starting at 7pm in the Larison Room of the Chester Library. Starting on page 25, "The War Years", we'll cover the period from the Revolutionary War to the War of 1812. While on that journey we'll recall a town called "Black River" and see it transformed to "Chester". Seeds of much of our history was planted at this time and many familiar names will crop up. Please join us for the next program on A Scrapbook of History.



## Community Garden Plots Are Still Available!

Grow your own organic fruits, vegetables and flowers in an ideal setting right in your own community at **Highlands Ridge Park**, 100 North Road, Chester. There's fencing against deer, woodchucks, rabbits and other critters and is located in full sun. Wheelbarrows, compost, watering cans and water is located on site. How-to programs will be offered throughout the gardening season and gardeners can rent one or two 8' x 16' plots. Rental fee for residents of the Chesters is \$30 per plot for one year; \$75 per plot for three years. Rental fee for non-residents is \$40 per plot for one year and \$100 per plot for three years.

Contact the Chester Twp. Environmental Commission at 879-5100 for more information.



## Morris Museum Exhibit—Jersey Rocks

Through September 5, 2011

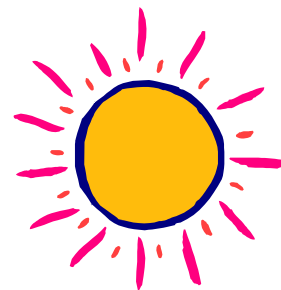


This groundbreaking exhibition, organized by the Morris Museum, explores New Jersey's pivotal role in the development of the rock & roll genre. Jersey Rocks will explore the rise of rock & roll in New Jersey from its early years through the 1970s and beyond, as "rock" evolved into new genres. This major exhibition will feature musicians, fans, concert venues, events, and DJ's— many of which made up the world of New Jersey rock & roll.



**Grogan's Chester Springs Pond**, late 1960s.

The food shack was located about where the current Burger King is now.



## A Look Back at Former Croot Award Winners

*contributed by Marcia Asdal*

**Andy Drysdale**, winner 1980, grew up on the family farm on E. Fox Chase Road.

*Andy remembers seeing Mr. Croot, the namesake of his future award, on his farm as they drove by.*



**The criteria for winning the award.** To the best of my knowledge, it was some contribution to local history. I can't say that I think I contributed much, but I certainly enjoyed volunteering for the CHS and hopefully I was helpful. They certainly didn't pick me for my GPA, which wasn't really great! The money was used for books at County College.

**Oldest person he knew as a kid.** My uncle, Russell Tiger was born in 1895, and John C. Rockefeller was born in 1898. I remember Herbert Conover who had the house in the center of town next to

the Fire Co. I believe he was born in the 1880s.

**What would people be surprised to know about Chester in the 1970's?** Chester was really a rural place. A lot of people had cows, chickens and other animals. My father had sold his cow herd around the time I was born, but the neighbors had them and we had some horses and a flock of chickens at various times. I think the thing I notice is that Chester doesn't smell the same!

**Farm life memories.** I remember in the late '60s and maybe early '70's they used to send a social worker around to check on the children of the farm families. There was a man who would drive an old pickup around to the farms, and the truck had a big wooden box in the back full of ice and fresh fish. His name was Mr. Smalley and he came from Dunellen. He would come to our place every Thursday and my mother would be waiting for him. She would pick out the fish she wanted and Mr. Smalley would take out a scale and hang it from a hook on the side of the box, then clean the fish right there on the box, weigh the filets, and wrap them up in wax paper.

**School field trips.** We took a school field trip to the post office, which was next to the Publick House. Mrs. Massey, mother of Larry, was there and we were shown how they sorted the mail! Another time they took us to Larison's Turkey Farm and Mr. Larison gave us all a white turkey feather! I can remember liking his fedora hat.

**Other memories.** The siren at the old Ralston fire house used to blow everyday at 5 pm. Wherever I was in the whole valley or up on Mt. Paul, I knew it was time to head towards home because dinner was at 6.

**Favorite class/teacher in high school?** Metal shop because I learned a lot of very practical things that would prove of tremendous value in blacksmithing. Mrs. Winkler, the Literature teacher, took an interest in my general disinterest in school when I was a senior and wanted my opinions about all sorts of things we were reading. I was sorry to hear that she had passed away some years ago before I took the opportunity to thank her.



Dear Members of the  
Chester Historical Society,

Thank you for sharing your  
knowledge of Chester with us.  
One thing I learned is in  
the Cooper Mansion they keep  
slaves in the basement with  
bars.

Sincerely,  
ELLE McLaughlin

**Len Taylor** and **Amanda Dean** accompanied *Mrs. Herzner* and *Mrs. Scarfo's* 3rd grade class on their 2nd annual bus tour of Chester.

Here are some excerpts from the children's **thank-you notes** of things they learned, with the "interpretative" spelling intact. ☺

- Chester took apart a building neatly and brang it somewhere else so they can rebuild it.
- You could see New York from Seward's Hill. That must be one tall hill.
- I learned that they couldn't buy sulplize they had to make it.
- People lived in manchons back then.
- The Old Factory maid beer, soda cream, and lemon lime soda. It was the best.
- Many buildings were shipped here.
- I learned that the Black River had Lenape living on the land.
- I learned there was a wineary on my street!
- The Black River Play House was here for a really long time.
- I learned that the Public house use to be a hotel.

Dear Chester Historical Society,

Thank you so much for taking the time to give my class and the third graders from Bragg School a guided tour of Chester.

We all learned so much including the teacher! My students came back to school with so much to share and talk about. Thank you,  
Barbara Herzner