



The Chester Historical Society's News & Views

Summer 2012



Preservation ~ Information ~ Education www.HistoricChesterNJ.com

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A Note from our President, Alison Dahl (Thanks to Meryl Carmel for the editing assistance!)

Time for our annual recap of events as we wrap up fiscal year 2012.

This was an unusually busy year for the Chester Historical Society that included a major move and encouraging information about the state of the archives. While we were sidetracked from "business as usual" in several ways, the experience has left us stronger, forward-looking and more committed than ever to preserving the history of the Chesters!



As a result of changes determined by the library, the Chester Historical Society is no longer based in the Carmen Smith Room. But thanks to the generosity of Chester Borough's Mayor and Council, we will soon establish our new home over at the Borough Offices at 50 North Road. This provides modern, convenient work space, and is fortuitously located near the archives storage at 100 North Road, courtesy of Chester Township's Mayor and Council.

When the new CHS office is settled, members of the public can arrange to do research at this site by contacting our soon-to-be-named Archives Chairperson. In addition, the CHS has access to the services of the library's part-time Local History Librarian. We were enormously pleased by feedback from professional archivist Gary Seretzky, who conducted our CAPES assessment, the purpose of which is to inspect and provide best practices and guidelines for organizing and preserving the vast array of materials in the archives. Please see the related article on page 3 in this issue regarding details of the CAPES assessment.

This year saw a small and dedicated band gather to further delve into Chester's past as they worked their way through Frances Greenidge's "Chester, New Jersey: A Scrapbook of History". The "study group" worked to refine and elaborate on the wealth of information this reference provides. The society has continued to grow its valuable Oral History library thanks to the dedicated efforts of board member Helen Jones, who has spent hours discussing the past with aging residents. To date the Oral History collection includes dozens of tapes from interviews that paint an important picture of the more recent past. Tapes and transcripts will be available to researchers once we are settled in our new quarters.

CHS was a sponsor and contributor to the Chester Trails Plan Project which had the goal of making Chester's abundant natural, artistic, commercial, and historic resources more accessible to residents and visitors. As part of the plan an updated Chester History Tour was developed. Two parents, Heather Ronco and Liz Gugliemini, simplified the Chester History Tour and made presentations to the third grade classes at Bragg Intermediate School. They created the fun "Chester Bingo" game. The Society provided artifacts from our collection to help bring to life the iron mining period of Chester. The third graders had an enjoyable and entertaining lesson on Chester history.

As summer winds down, we are pleased to note that the Society remains fiscally sound. We are already looking forward to reinvigorating our well received history programs beginning with Gordon Ward's presentation of "Welcome to the Past" in October. Many of our monthly CHS programs will continue to be held at the library's Larison Room. New this year will be history programs specifically geared to school age children as a result of the tremendous positive feedback we received from students, parents and teachers regarding our Colonial Days contributions. Please see related articles in this newsletter.

In closing, thank you for your continued support---our members are the lifeblood of our organization!

Hope to see you on **Sunday, September 9th** for our **annual meeting and picnic** at the Stone Barn at Willowood Arboretum!



Mark Your Calendars!



The Chester Historical Society's **Annual Meeting and Summer Picnic** will be held rain or shine on **Sunday, September 9th** from noon to 4 o'clock pm at the Stone Barn at Willowwood Arboretum in Chester.



CHS members are invited free of charge, and are asked to bring an appetizer, a salad, or a dessert, ready to serve on the buffet table. Guests of members are welcome (guests will be charged \$8 per person with reservations/payment in advance please). Traditional CHS picnic fare and refreshing libations will be served along with a healthy dose of

good cheer. Please watch for your Summer Picnic invitation in the mail and send in your reservation by August 31st. Directions to Willowwood are on the invitation.

Multi-talented author and educator **Gordon Ward** returns with his multi-media presentation

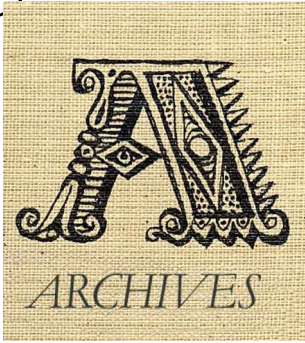


"Welcome to the Past" on **Thursday, October 11th** at 7 p.m. at the Chester Library. Mr. Ward will entertain us with his anecdotes, poetry, songs, photos, and guitar accompaniment that inspire us to value our collective and individual histories. We'll ask him to update us on his latest paranormal research findings as well! All are invited to attend this delightful evening, and to bring friends and family **free of charge**. Refreshments will be served afterwards.

On **Sunday, October 28th**, take a **Walking Tour** of Chester's **"Iron Heyday"** Furnace led by Chester Township Historian Len Taylor. Go back to the days when iron was king and almost as valuable as gold. The tour will last between one and two hours, walking on generally flat ground with a few easy climbs up and down an old railroad embankment. Participants must be 6 years or older, and those under 18 accompanied by an adult. If it's raining, the tour will be postponed. Meet at the Dept. of Public Works garage on Furnace Road at 1:00 p.m., where there is ample parking. Participation is limited, so please register ahead of time by calling Len Taylor at 908 879-7249. *Hope to see you there!*



We'll launch winter festivities on **Sunday, December 2nd** with the **CHS Holiday Party** at noon at a location to be announced. We are looking for an historical site in Chester, so if you are willing to host a lovely bunch of CHS members (we provide everything except the house), let us know!



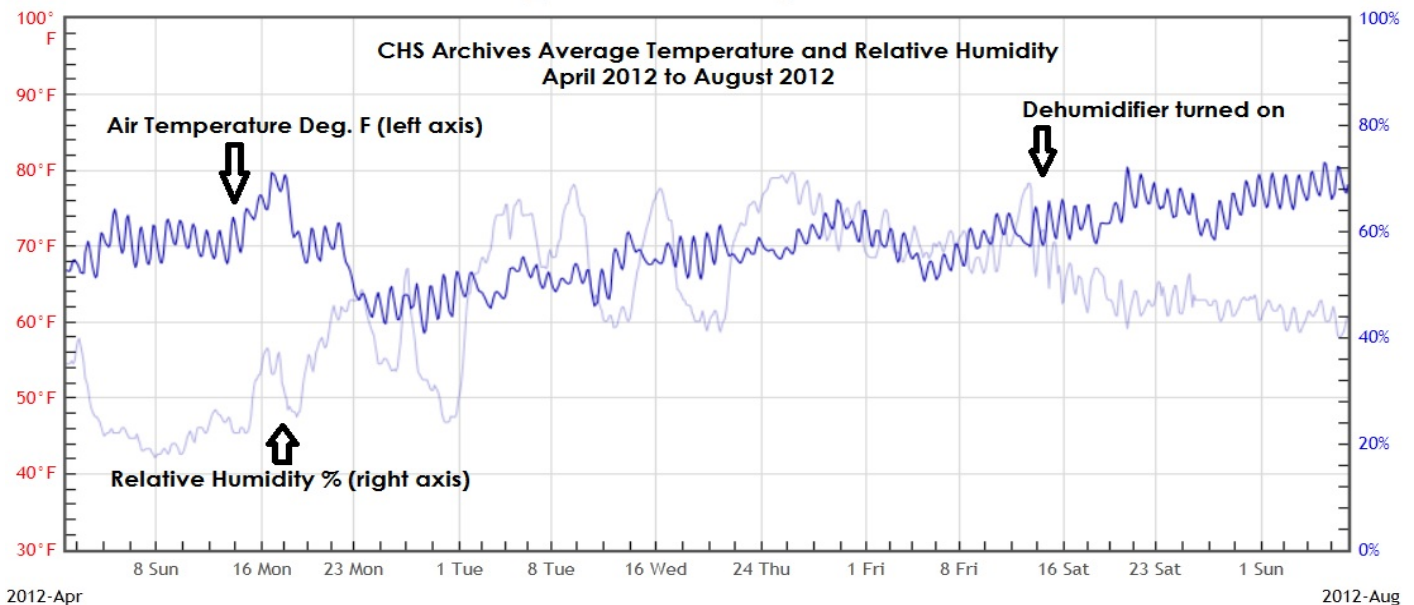
First Steps Taken to Organize Our Archives!

The goal -- **to organize the collections of Chester's past** -- newspaper clippings, photos, bottles, ledgers, arrowheads, letters, books, clothing, maps -- a wide array of precious miscellany that comprise the archives of the Chester Historical Society. Ultimately, each of the thousands of items in the archives will be catalogued, preserved, stored, and made accessible to the public. Adequate preparation, as with any major project, is critical to the success of the project.

The archives are stored in a large well-lit room in the former Bell Labs laboratory building at 100 North Road, now owned by Chester Township. The first step in preparation to organize the archives was taken in November 2011 when an *Indoor Environmental Quality Assessment* and *Mold Sampling* was conducted at the archives storage room. The sampling results indicated no unusual sources or conditions. It was determined to be a satisfactory work and storage environment, so it was on to the next step.

In April, the archives facility underwent an assessment by an organization named Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (MARAC) New Jersey Caucus. MARAC New Jersey Caucus manages a free consultant service with funding by the NJ Historical Commission. The assessment service is called Caucus Archival Projects Evaluation Service, or CAPES.

The CAPES assessment was performed on site by professional archivist Gary Saretzky. The assessment looked at characteristics of the physical plant including temperature, humidity, light levels, pests presence (none) and recommended steps to assure optimum conditions. The CAPES report provided extensive, valuable guidelines from defining the scope of the collections to how to implement archive policies, to how to go about organizing and making the collections available -- with a wealth of recommendations in between.



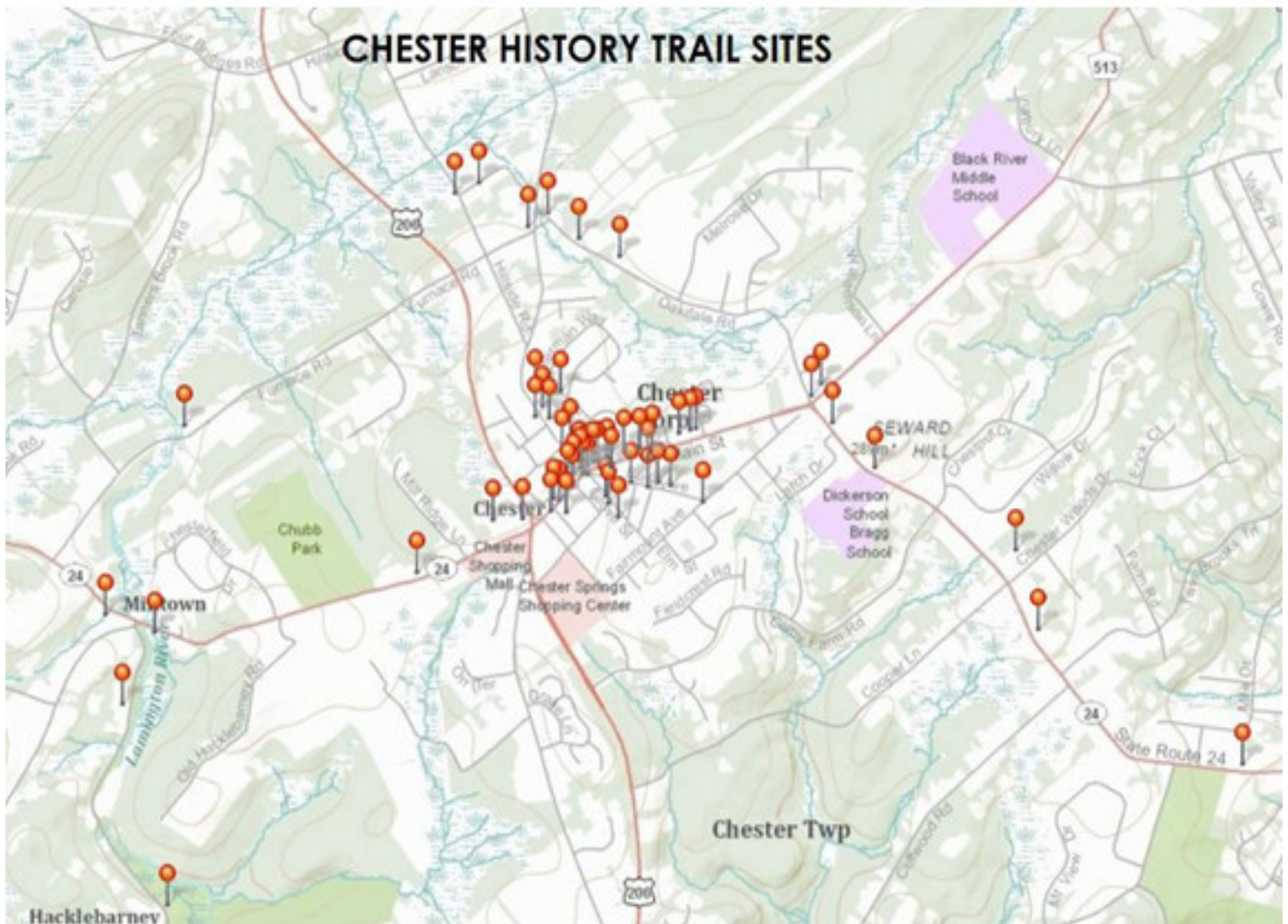
We **monitor the temperature and humidity** in our Archives room. When the humidity increased higher than desired, a dehumidifier was installed in June and the relative humidity decreased. Over the summer the temperature has started to rise so we are working with Chester Township to provide air conditioning to the room.

Chester History Trail - Updated!

Submitted by Edward Ng

Since 2011 the Chester Historical Society has been supporting and working with a Borough and Township project team to create the "Integrated Trails Ecosystem Plan for Chester", popularly known as "Chester Trails". Historic sites which cluster around downtown and dot the countryside are an important part of the trails ecosystem which permeates Chester. Just as a hiker, walker, or biker enjoys the natural environment, we felt it was important for them to enjoy our historic heritage. Using previous Historical Society publications, 60 historical sites were selected for inclusion in the Chester Trails Plan. Choosing the 60 was hard, but this is just the first selection. Hopefully we will continue to add more.

We have put the 60 sites on a PowerPoint presentation, the Chester History Tour, which will be the subject of a future CHS program.





Chester History Tour

People & Places & Stories

Assembled by Edward Ng, February 2012

Each of the 60 sites on the CHS **Auto and Walking Tour** has at least one recent picture of the site, background and historical information. One example is the Methodist Church which we can appreciate even if it burned down in 1921. Using a picture from the CHS archives, we can still tell its story and provide a sense of place, even if it is only a memory.

Methodist Church Federated Church – just a memory



- Methodists have been worshipping in Chester as early as 1868. In 1881 they moved into a building that was moved from Bedminster, now the Black River Playhouse building.
- In 1908 a new Methodist Church was built near the site of the current Boy Scout Cabin in Municipal Park. The church had a "bowled floor lecture room opening into the main audience room, paneled ceiling, beautiful Cathedral glass windows of elaborate design, steam heat, modern pews, choir gallery, a good piano, and lighted by acetylene gas; value of the property \$8000".
- Due to economic reasons the 3 churches of Chester formed the Federated Church in 1918 with 120 Congregationalists, 100 Presbyterians, and 60 Methodists. The Congregationalists withdrew after the war in 1920.
- When the Methodist Church burned down in 1921, most of the Methodists joined the Presbyterian Church.



Methodist Church which burned down in 1921



Boy Scout Cabin corner of Collis Ln. & Main St.

























Using the Chester History Tour, Jon Wagar (Conservation Resources Inc.) has kindly created a "Chester History Trail" that is **available online** (<http://chesterhistorytrail.wordpress.com/>).

If you have a smart phone that is web enabled you can access the tour including maps, pictures, and descriptions as you walk from site to site.

CHESTER BINGO

Submitted by Edward Ng

The Chester Historical Society has been helping the teachers and parents of Bragg School 3rd Graders for the last several years with their Chester history studies. This year the Society made available the Chester History Tour (see page 5) and a number of supporting items from our archives. Two parents, Heather Ronco and Liz Gugliemini, simplified the Chester History Tour PowerPoint and made presentations to the 3rd grade classes. They also cleverly created "Chester Bingo" which is described in their letter to the Society (see page 7). We look forward to working with our local schools to help them appreciate and enjoy Chester history!

B	I	N	G	O
 General Nathan Cooper Mansion	 Hull-Brown Tavern	 Miner's Boarding House (aka Patch House)	 Drovers Lot Tavern (Pegasus Antiques)	 Old Factory Building
 Seward King Barn	 Deacon Cramer House	 Luse House (first blacksmith shop)	 Memorial Island (Hitching Post)	 Tippet Bottling
 Seward Hill	 Chester Cemetery	FREE SPACE	 Rockefeller Center	 Gardner House (Iron ore discovery)
 Swayze House Riamede Farm	 First Congregational Church	 Presbyterian Church	 Luse Tavern	 Cooper Grist Mill
 Dickerson-Treadway House	 Zephaniah-Drake Brick Hotel (Public House)	 John Drake House (Weichert Realty)	 Dr. Hedges Drugstore	 Pitney House (Cider Mill)