

# The Chester Historical Society's



# NEWS & VIEWS

March 2014

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## Len Taylor (1936-2013)

### Chester Historian

By Edward Ng



Chester Historical Society Logo Designed by Len Taylor

We have the hills of Tennessee and the supermarkets of New Jersey to thank for bringing Len to Chester. Though a Jersey lad from West Orange, who after graduating from Lehigh, class of '58 with a Fine Arts degree, he somehow ended up in Tennessee and marrying a lovely, Carthage native, Lois Key. Upon returning to New Jersey in 1964, as a designer and developer for Associate Designers in Maplewood, Len and Lois

searched for a rural property with a manageable commute to Maplewood. At the periphery of potential areas, they came to Chester and liked it because it reminded Lois of the hills of mid-Tennessee. Just to the west of town they bought a house that was the summer home of an Irvington truck body shop owner, complete with a kitchen sink made from a recycled truck body, an enormous 1500 gallon oil tank, an electric generator the size of a VW bug, but no insulation, uneven water supply, and dicey heating<sup>1</sup>. Of course, in a typical career move, once they settled in Chester that summer, Len decided to take a

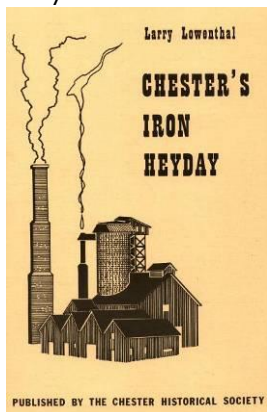
<sup>1</sup> Daily Record Sept. 10, 1968. *It Was Charming, Chilly, Wasp-y* by Marjorie Kaschewski

position with Foodarama in Freehold -- so much for the easy commute.

I think it was that house which launched Len's historical career. It was no ordinary house. Here is the description from the Chester Township Historic Sites Survey: *The original portion of the house, now the rear wing, was built around 1840, and shows signs of being burned. The front part of the structure is a double house built to house furnace workers at the nearby Chester Furnace, operative in the latter 19<sup>th</sup> century. W.J. Taylor, superintendent of the Furnace, lived in half of the house. Coincidentally, he may be a relative of the present owner. (I see Fate at work!)*

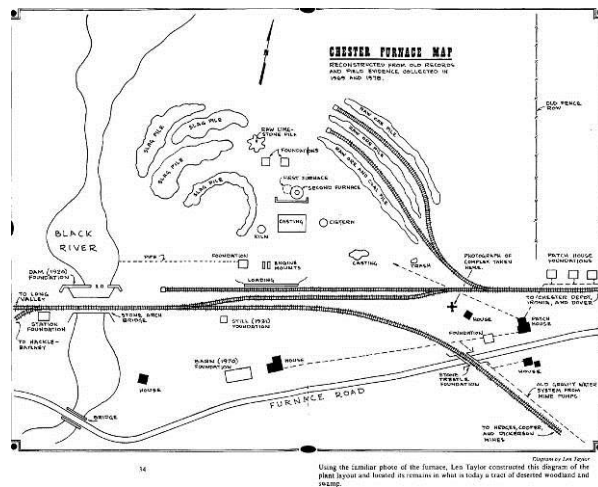
However, it was the "back yard" that would be even more interesting historically. In 1875 William J. Taylor led an effort to build a furnace to process ore from the Hedges Mine. Interested citizens of Chester raised \$5,000 (about \$110,000 in today's currency) to purchase the 53 acre tract that would become the Chester Furnace in 1879 and Len's backyard in 1964. The Chester Furnace was a technical and commercial success. By 1884 it had a weekly output of over

300 ton of iron, employed over 30 men, was a mainstay of Chester's two railroads and the local economy. In 1880, William Taylor bought the J.D.G. Carlisle farmhouse and rebuilt it for his residence with the



furnace nearby<sup>2</sup>. Eighty four years later another Taylor family moved in.

Given Len's innate sense of curiosity, it was no mystery that exploring the Chester Furnace site would become one of his passions. In an interview with the Observer-Tribune in 1990, the reporter described his early explorations: *Taylor began to research the furnace site, and identified the ruins of the 60-foot-tall furnace, a second smaller furnace, a cistern for collecting rain water, the mounting area for a donkey engine, with pits for the 12-to-14-foot diameter flywheels on either side, and the route the railroad tracks took onto and off of the site. His first full-scale exploration into Chester history and resulted in a map in Larry Lowenthal's book, "Chester's Iron Heyday."<sup>3</sup> Len would also put his artistic skills to work and created the artwork for the book cover and map shown below.*



Len's involvement with the Chester Historical Society started even before

<sup>2</sup> Lowenthal, Larry. 1980. *Chester's Iron Heyday*. Chester Historical Society.

<sup>3</sup> Observer Tribune May 3, 1990, *Local Historian Honored* by Barbara Lee Rybolt

it was born. He was one of the Founding Fathers. Who would have thought that a second grader and Hitler were involved? As reported by the Observer Tribune writer: *During an interview last week, Taylor conceded that he wasn't always interested in history. He said, "Sometime around 1965, a second grader said something about 'a jerk named Adolf Hitler' to me. I got to thinking that Hitler is an historical figure to him, but to me he's only a few days ago." It wasn't long before Taylor began to think of preserving and documenting events and structures for kids. "That got me into the Chester Historical Society and from there things got out of hand," he said.*

Len along with 57 other charter members founded the Chester Historical Society, officially on April 11, 1969. Hendrik Rozenbroek was president, Rev. Bob Maseroni vice president, Nancy Collins secretary, and Len Taylor was the first treasurer. Over the years, he would serve as Historic Sites Committee Chairman, Township Historian, and also President. Lois and Len were stalwarts of the Society from its inception.

Len's historical interests extended beyond the Chester Furnace and along with other members of the Historical Society helped compile the Historic Sites Surveys for Chester Township and Chester Borough. They worked hard to add Chester locales to the National Register of Historic Sites and New Jersey Register of Historic Sites including The Publick House (The Brick Tavern), the First Congregational Church, the Cooper

Mansion, the Cooper Mill, and the Merchiston Farm at Bamboo Brook.

In 1986 Len was appointed Chester Township Historian and in 1990 was honored by the New Jersey Historical Society with a Local Historian's Award of Distinction. The 1990 Observer Tribune article wrote: *The list of Taylor's*

*accomplishments takes up almost five typed pages, and range from making architectural descriptions, pen-and-ink sketches of historic Chester*

*buildings, giving lectures, researching old buildings, drafting a preservation ordinance, assisting in securing state grants for historical preservation, to videotaping present-day Chester.... To explain his productivity Len remembered that someone once said to him, "The definition of history is one damn thing after another," and there never seems to be an end to the projects.*



*Historian of Distinction*  
 Leonard J. Taylor stands in front of the Old Cooper Mill on Route 24 in Chester Township. Chester Township's official historian was recently presented with the Local Historian Award of Distinction by the N.J. Historical Society.

In addition to a desire for preserving and documenting buildings, Len was an accomplished ambassador for Chester's history for youngsters and adults. He has led numerous walking tours around the Black River's collection of railroad and mining sites and was well known for his "Furnace Tour". One of his more recent exploits was to take busloads of third graders on a road trip around the historic sites of Chester. I guess he never forgot that second grader that got him

started on his history sojourn, but there was probably no mention of Hitler on the bus.

Len passed away on New Years' eve 2013, aged 77. A year earlier, he wrote a passionate article for the Chester Historical Society's News & Views, *About Historic Downtowns*. Len

doesn't sentimentalize Chester, he writes it is "eccentric and unpredictable, but a huge boost to the human spirit". Len, you too were eccentric and unpredictable, but a huge boost to the human spirit. Don't worry, we know, there will never be an end to the projects. ■

## Anita Rhodes is Volunteer of the Year for Chester Borough

By Edward Ng

Anita Rhodes, CHS Treasurer and long time member, was recognized as volunteer of the year at the annual dinner honoring Chester Borough's volunteers on Jan. 11, 2014. Mayor Bob Davis presented Anita with a plaque and gift to commemorate her many contributions to CHS, Shade Tree Commission, and Board of Adjustment. ■



## The Early Taverns of Black River

By Joan Case

### Luse Tavern



In the 1740's, Benjamin Luse owned most of today's Chester village. He erected a tavern on the corner of Main and Hillside Roads, opposite the present

day Publick House. This would have been the first tavern built in what was then known as Black River.

In the early 1800's it was called "Fairclo's Tavern" and was owned by Isaiah Fairclo, inherited with other village property from his father Thomas, who had earlier purchased most of the village land from the Luse family.

Isaiah may have run it himself, or perhaps

John Calvin Corwin ran it for him. Mr. Corwin was called "innkeeper in 1799, and because he lived next door it is conceivable that he "kept inn" for Fairclo. Corwin may have built the house that sat next door to the tavern and painted it red and that is why on deeds, the property is called "the red house lot." The "red house" was torn down in 1964.

Except for the image of Jacob Drake's Tavern, the pictures are of today's buildings, only parts of which were the tavern. The image is from a menu, reproduced in a December, 1962 article in the Observer Tribune. ■



### **Peter Brown's Tavern**

Also in the 1740's, Walter Brown owned the property "down the Landing Road," which we know as the corner of Old Chester Road and Pottersville Road. Not too long after he came to the Black River area, he along with a number of other Black River families went to a place called "Union Brick." This was a community called Mt. Hermon in Warren County and today is just a cemetery.

Walter's brother, Peter Brown, took over the property and opened around 1750, Black River's second tavern. It is believed that this original tavern is in the lower section of the main house on the Tranquillity Farm and is also known as the Hardin property.

Much of the farms were filled with apple orchards, which made for plenty of cider and

apple brandy being produced (and drank).

### **Hull-Brown Tavern**



The date for the building of the third tavern is unknown, but it did change from a home into a tavern around 1760. In 1736, David Brown came from Southold, purchased a 200 acre tract of land to build his home on at the corner of Pleasant Hill and Hillside Roads. The structure was a typical early farmhouse with one good-sized room, with a very large fireplace and cupboard across one entire wall. There were two small rooms adjoining at the rear. It is believed that this early kitchen wing was David Brown Sr.'s original farmhouse and that at some time later, after the removal of one wall, it was attached to the north end of Trustum Hull's tavern house.

Trustum Hull came from Piscataway and built

onto the Brown home and turned it into the "Hull-Brown Tavern". Hull's daughter married David Brown, Jr. and at some point, brought his son-in-law into the tavern business with him, no doubt teaching him the art of inn-keeping. We know that David later received the property from Trustum Hull and continued to operate the inn for many years. On a deed of 1810 it was called "David Brown's Tavern." So for 153 years, the old tavern house was owned and lived in by David Brown and his descendants!

Hull's tavern house was a rectangular one with a chimney at each end and a hall through the center with a door at each end. To the left was the tap room with a bar along the wall, and there was a small window at eye level, that was about 12x18 inches in that wall. The innkeeper, standing behind the bar, could look over his shoulder through the little window, and see all who came and went through the big front door.

## Jacob Drake's Tavern

In 1779, Jacob Drake Jr. took over a beautiful old farmhouse, which was built around 1752, at the crossroads of Oakdale Road, Dover Chester Road and Main Street. In 1800, Drake enlarged his tavern from the original farmhouse to a more commodious place of fifteen rooms, and a large dining room and taproom on the first

floor and from that point, it was known as Jacob Drake's Tavern.



This building had hand hewn oak beams, mortar made of clay and horsehair and a small "peek" window into the hall that was still evident at the time of the fire, which

destroyed it in 1962. A few of the names it has held during its 183 years of operation were the Crossroads Hotel, Union Hotel, Flagstaff Inn, and the Crossroads Inn, owned by the Campbell family and then lastly the Dean family. The Crossroads Professional offices were eventually built on the corner. ■

## Chester's "Patrons of Husbandry"

By Marla Jackson

Back in March, I was sorting a box in the Archives and found a lapel pin with an attached ribbon, about 8 inches long and 2 ½ inches wide, that read "Patrons of Husbandry, Chester Grange No. 198." The pin and emblem looked like enamel, and the "shaking hands" near the bottom of the ribbon were a tell-tale sign (see color front and B&W back pictures). I was quite excited because, as many of you know, my background and training is in commercial agriculture. Those "Patrons of Husbandry" were members of the Grange! The next time we were working at the Archives, Helen Jones and Marilyn Guerin said they didn't think there was a Grange in Chester, because they used to travel to Flanders for the dances with the Grange there. So I was curious!

A note from Carmen Smith, attached to a number of items including the pin, said the items were "donated by Clint Mack La Valley from Littleton, Colorado." I hadn't heard of her. But I wanted to see what I could find out about Grange No. 198. A quick look at Greenidge's "A Scrapbook of



*History*" noted that "according to the By Laws, Chester Grange No. 198 was organized in 1913. Meetings were held upstairs in the (Hardin) Masonic Building" (pg. 132).

That was it! No other information followed. An internet search for a list of the current active Granges revealed no information. How disappointing.

After some reading about the organization of the State Board of Agriculture from the turn of the last century, I discovered several lists of State agricultural societies. They were

reported in "circulars" each year as part of the Agricultural reports to the legislature. I began searching the yearly lists for mention of our No. 198.

A little history of the Grange movement might be in order. The group's title is The National Grange of



the Order of the Patrons of Husbandry. It was a non-partisan national organization established at the end of the Civil war to support agriculture causes and communities. Each "subordinate" grange

(like a chapter) belongs to a "Pomona Grange," which covered an area perhaps as big as a County or larger, depending on the density of the population. The organization survives as a thriving organization to this day. Especially at its founding, the group advocated for farmers and their needs. The Granges were involved in lobbying for the establishment of fair freight charges (primarily related to agricultural crops), the Cooperative Extension Service, the Farm Credit System and "rural free delivery" of the mail. Before 1902, if you lived on an isolated farmstead, you were responsible for picking up your mail at a post office that might be quite a distance from you, or paying to have it delivered from your post office to you. "RFD" meant that the United States post office would deliver your mail to you without extra charge, no matter where you lived.

Although the Grange movement was agricultural in nature, it also evolved

as a social, educational and recreational source for anyone interested in joining. Many non-farmers were members, and women were involved from the founding. In fact, one officer had to be a woman. It took a while, but in 1917 the New Jersey Grange established a separate section to support information and demonstrations for homemakers.

In the 1915 State Board of Agriculture Circular, Chester Grange No. 198 was listed as a subordinate Grange, and the officers were: Master (that is, President) Romeo Robinson, Secretary John P. Stout and Lecturer Mrs. Isaac Rowe. Although the 1922 circular listed Chester, all offices were vacant. In 1923, Chester No. 198 was no longer listed, although "Morris and Union" continued to have a county representative in A. W. Fund, from Chatham. The year 1923 also saw the loss of officers in nearby Livingston No. 104 and other granges in north-eastern New Jersey. Perhaps it was during these years that the affinity for agriculture began to wane in Morris County as development increased and "Gentlemen Farmers" went on to other pursuits. The granges in Sussex, Warren and Central Jersey remained strong, but the only grange left today in Morris County is Meyersville No. 188 that meets at the Meyersville Grange Hall in Gillette.

If you know more about the Chester Grange, have a copy of the charter or know Ms. La Valley's connection to Chester, I would love to hear from you. Please contact via email or phone using the information at the bottom of the page. ■

**Thank You Henderson & Neuberg!** The Society extends a sincere thank you to Peter Neuberg and William Leach of Henderson & Neuberg LLC who prepared our financial statements for the year ended September 30, 2013. Copies are available to members. To obtain a copy email or phone us using information below.

### **Mystery Photo from Summer 2013 Newsletter Identified:**

This is Jack Hyde in 1953, author of a touching memoir of growing up in Chester in the 1950's. Helen Jones had correctly identified him as "Tommy Hyde's brother", but it wasn't until the Taylors found his cover letter to the memoir that we knew it was Jack. Including this whimsical picture, he chronicles his Williamson School days, friends, teachers, Dr. Fry, bus driver "Dink", and many other characters, and escapades in humorous fashion. Contact us if you would like to borrow a copy. ■



### **We Need Your Help! Vote on Future Programs**

**What would you be most interested to learn about Chester's history?  
Please let us know by ranking the following topics and/or adding your own.**

- Black River Industry ~ Forges, Mills, Mines, Agriculture, and Railroads.
- Chester Villages and Prominent Structures
- Grand Estates of Chester ~ Kay, Luce, Mennen and Chubb
- Famous Historic Families of Chester
- Landowners and Land Use Through the Years
- History of the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches in Chester
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Please either detach and mail your response to PO Box 376, or e-mail, or phone it to us. Contact information is given below. Your responses will guide us in planning upcoming programs. If you have resources or expertise related to these topics, please let us know! Watch for upcoming program announcements in local newspapers, upcoming newsletters, on our web site, and through Chester community calendars. Thanks, Alison.

#### **CHS Officers:**

**President & Archives – Edward Ng**  
**Vice President & Publicity – Meryl Carmel**  
**Treasurer – Anita Rhodes**  
**Programs – Alison Dahl**  
**Corresponding Secretary – Lois Taylor**

**Recording Secretary – Elaine Hanington**  
**Architectural Preservation – Matt Koppinger**  
**Membership – Marla Jackson**  
**Oral History – Helen Jones**  
**Members at Large - John Pfaff, Helen Jones**  
**Borough Historian – Ed Hanington**

#### **News & Views**

**Editor and Photos (except where indicated) - Edward Ng. If you would like to help with the newsletter, archives or other CHS activities, please contact us.**  
**Membership information is on the website.**