



Happy Spring! Or so I hope, with the lengthening of the days, our snow weary minds can turn to more enriching activities than what the long winter has afforded us. The Spring CHS newsletter offers four histories: about an iconic Chester landmark, a failed lake that could have been a landmark, a poignant reminiscence about a landmark in danger of being lost, and the most fascinating Chester woman of the 20th Century brought to life aided by newly found photos in the CHS archives. We welcome a new author, Bruce Clark, Patriots' Path Steward for the Furnace area. Finally images from the Dec. 2014 Holiday party round out this issue. Have a great spring!

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The "Telephone Pole Farm"- A Chester Icon
Bell Laboratory Chester Outdoor Research Lab
By Edward Ng



1970's Chester Bell Lab sign near the telephone pole test plots · L. Keggan

Arguably, the two most iconic visual highlights of Chester are Larison's Turkey Farm restaurant and the "telephone pole farm" on North Road. The history of the Turkey Farm is well documented in the CHS book A Scrapbook of History: Chester, New Jersey and on the CHS website¹. The Scrapbook gives an account of the "pole farm" and this article adds to the story. As it turns out, there are many fascinating stories of the "pole farm" and beyond: underground oceans, hillside bunkers and tunnels, land based ships, man made lightening, sea plows, waveguides, a fire pond,

¹ <http://historicchesternj.com/newsitems/larisonsturkeyfarm.html>

and many more. This site was the outdoor laboratory for one of the world's most famous and successful corporate research units, AT&T's Bell Labs.

Our story starts in 1925 when Bell Telephone Laboratories was created. In 1928 it rented 15 acres of farmland in Chester for outdoor testing, but this proved to be inadequate for their purposes and 85 additional acres of farmland were purchased in early spring of 1930. One of the main reasons the Field Laboratory was established in Chester was Seward's Hill. With an elevation of 950 feet, it is one of the highest points in Morris County. More importantly for outdoor testing, it provides many types of topography and harsh weather such as blazing sunshine, high winds, driving rain, sleet, and icing. The property was large enough to encompass mile-long runs of cables on poles. It was also not far from Bell Lab's main office in Murray Hill².

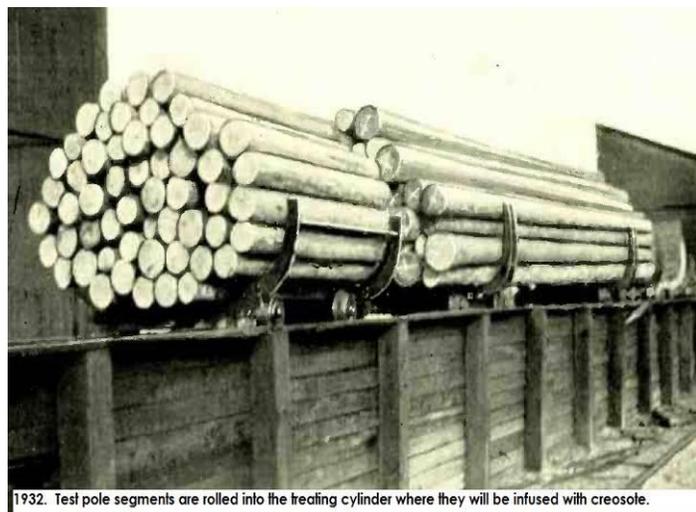


1931. C.Q. Lumsden taking a core sample from a pole. Seward's Hill is in the background.

Seward's Hill was part of one of the largest landholdings in Chester, first purchased by Obadiah Seward in 1740. Obadiah was the great-great grandfather of William H. Seward, best known as Lincoln's Secretary of State, Governor and Senator from New York. He was the prime mover for the purchase of Alaska. Most of the land remained in the Seward family until 1958.

The Chester Historical Society has started a major project to assemble a history of Bell Labs activities at the Chester outdoor laboratory. In our March 2013 Newsletter, we started what we hope will be a series of articles with the premier story of "The Fantastic". This story about the "telephone pole farm" is the second installment in the series. Please contact us if you have information you would like to share about the Chester outdoor laboratory. We offer our grateful thanks to Loretta Keggan, Dave Gibson, Dan Pope and all other past Bell Labs Chester alumnae for helping us get started (and keep us going). Hearty thanks go to P. Fassbender, C. Hensley, and Telephone Collectors International for their help.

At the beginning of the 20th century, poles were made from trees which were naturally durable and resistant to fungal and insect damage. However, economics necessitated the use of trees which were not naturally resistant, but could be made so using chemical treatments. Tests were needed to determine the best treatments and how long they would



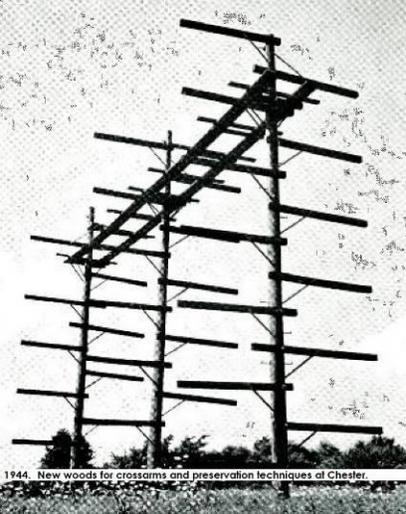
1932. Test pole segments are rolled into the treating cylinder where they will be infused with creosole.

last. Bell Labs established climatically different test sites in Chester, NJ, Gulfport, MS, and Limon, CO. Creosote was the preservative of choice and after soaking eight foot pole sections at a central location, they were analyzed for creosote penetration, and then samples sent to the three test sites.



1932. Test section showing white fungal growth within the wood.

² Watling, R.G. in Field Laboratory for Outside-Plant Studies, Bell Laboratories Record. 1931 July. Pages 529-534.



Poles were sunk two feet into the ground and then revisited annually to record their condition and note damage. Periodically cores were taken or entire poles removed to determine the condition of the interior of the posts and how much creosote remained. Shown above is a diseased pole cross section with clearly defined white fungal mats³. Research at Chester also included other wood items such as crossarms⁴ and wood wire reels.

The telephone pole test site has been an attraction for visitors to Chester since its inception⁵ attracting scientists, engineers, and interested people from all over the world. Though we are more likely to see it driving by on North Road, rather than visiting in our hats and overcoats like these gentlemen, it is an enduring Chester landmark and welcomes us to Chester Township's Highlands Ridge Park.



Research from Chester benefitted AT&T's operations nationwide. Given that there are now over 160 million wood poles, carrying electricity, cable TV, internet, and lighting in the USA⁶, I would conclude that the research from the Chester Outdoor Laboratory played an important role in developing and creating our modern infrastructure. ◼

Lake Takene – Unfulfilled
Lake Chester Park – What might have been
By Bruce Clark

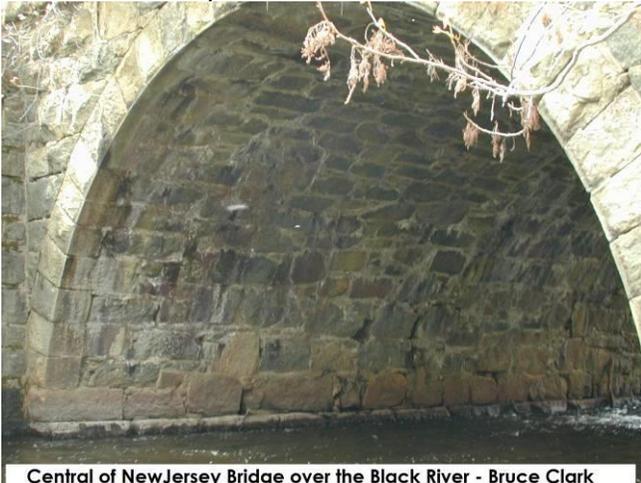
Few would guess that the 3000-acre Black River Fish and Wildlife Management Area with its freshwater marsh and swampy woodland was once the proposed site for a private recreational complex for New Jersey utility workers.



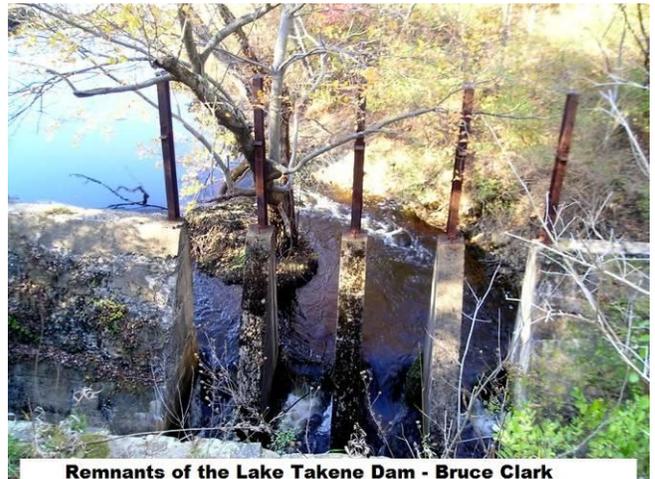
³ Lumsden, G. Q. in Proving Grounds for Telephone Poles, Bell Lab Record, 1932, September. pages 9 -14
⁴ Lumsden, C. Q. in New Woods for Crossarms and Their Preservation, in Bell Laboratory Record, 1944, October, pages 573-576.
⁵ Anon. in Bell Laboratory Record, 1945, January. page 14.
⁶ NPR What's up with Those Utility Poles. Jan. 2007 Christopher Joyce interview with Brian Hayes, author of Infrastructure.
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6735420>

On June 9, 1919, the Central Jersey Power Company of Tom's River (an early predecessor of Jersey Central Power and Light, JCP&L), purchased a large tract of land in Chester Township from local property owners John and Pauline Bergman. The utility's ambitious plan: to create a lake resort for its employees directly north of Furnace Road and bounded on the west by Tanners Brook Road and on the east by Hillside Road.⁷ Central Jersey Power lost no time in moving their plan forward and by December, 1919 had sold several half-acre plots for the newly named "Lake Chester Park" to employees eager to enjoy restful vacations in rural Morris County. In addition to sub-dividing and selling the parcels, a lake needed to be created.

Taking its name from a village near Hammaro in Sweden, Lake Takene was to be formed by a newly constructed dam located adjacent to the bridge over the Black River that was built by the Central Railroad of New Jersey (CNJ) in 1876 (which can be seen to the left of the home at 46 Furnace Road).



Central of New Jersey Bridge over the Black River - Bruce Clark



Remnants of the Lake Takene Dam - Bruce Clark

The dam was constructed following a "barrage" design, and consisted of four side-by-side concrete piers with gates that could be opened or closed to regulate the depth of the lake. The remnants of the dam are still visible from the top of the bridge (which is now part of the Patriot's Path network of hiking trails).



Sign compliments of Lois Taylor - Chester Historical Society Archives - Photo by Bruce Clark

To enable easy access to the Lake from different parts of the state, Central Jersey Power also constructed a railroad station a short distance from the Black River Bridge (the foundation of which remains visible from the Patriots' Path trail), with signs directing prospective owners and visitors to the Lake Chester Park resort.

Unfortunately, things didn't turn out as the company had planned. Whether because of a surveying error or management misjudgment, the water for the lake quickly backed up over Hillside Road, the major northbound thoroughfare at that time. Unable to come to a workable solution, the company abandoned the project⁸. The tract remained under the ownership of Central Jersey Power's successor, Central New Jersey Power and Light,

⁷ Frances Greenidge writes ([A Scrapbook of History – Chester, New Jersey](#)) that the lake was "to be 500-1500 feet wide and 5 miles long" and that "This was to be a lake for generating electric power, for cutting ice, and for "pleasure," with houses built around the shore, and docks for rowboats and motor boats" (page 137).

⁸ In a story in the April 9, 1970 [Observer-Tribune](#), "On the Shores of Lake Takene", it was reported that "when the water backed up uncontrollably, the state condemned the project".

until 1943, when it was purchased by Mrs. Anna Wendel, whose son and daughter-in-law then sold some of the land privately, with the majority of the parcel entering the NJ State Green Acres Program in the early 1960's⁹. ■

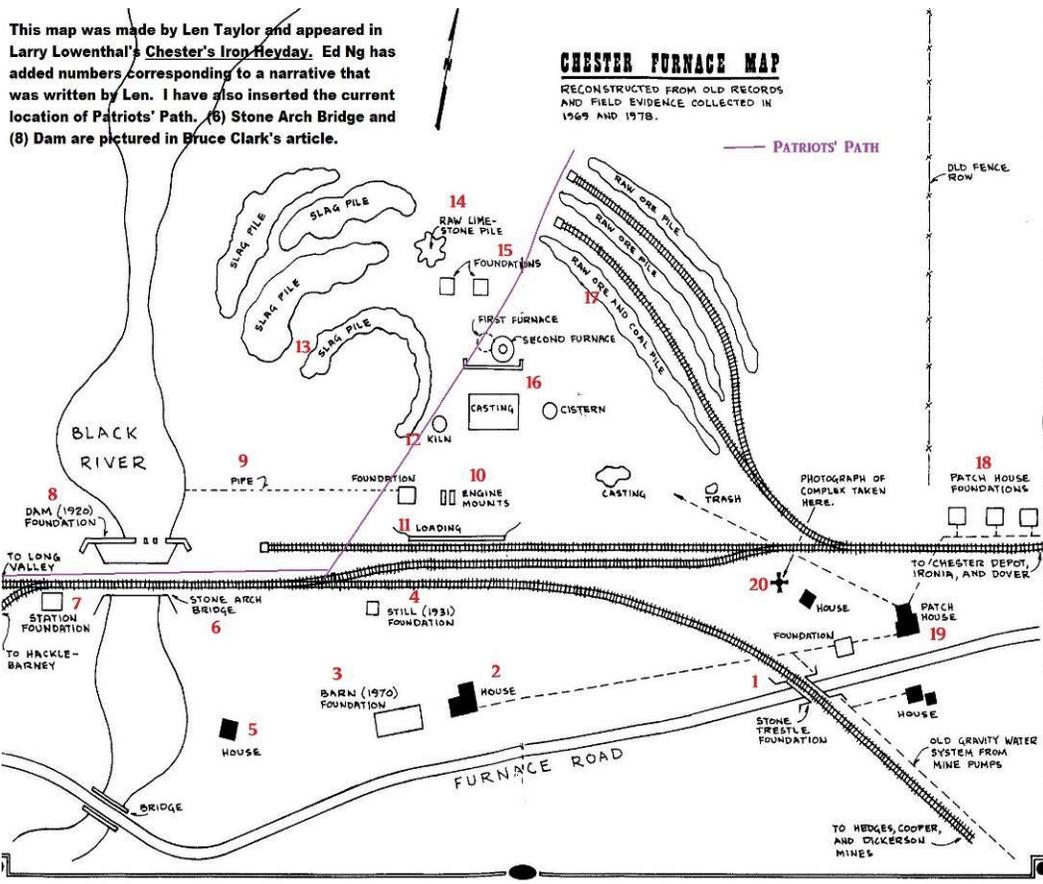
Editor's Note: Before passing away in 2013, Len Taylor penned a number of short essays. Lois Taylor has kindly shared them with CHS and we will use them to augment our histories. Part of Len's furnace research was published in our March 2014 Newsletter. This reminiscence ties in nicely with Bruce Clark's Lake Takene story. Following a suggestion from historian Joe Macasek, we have acquired the Sanborn Insurance Maps for Chester. One of the Sanborn Maps was done for the Chester Furnace. We provide a copy of that map and one done by Len for comparison. CHS and friends are doing their best to make sure the history of the Chester Furnace does not "melt back into the landscape".

Finding the Chester Furnace

By Len Taylor

Most of us history enthusiasts know the feeling of walking through the forest and finding an old cellar hole, an unusual pile of dirt, an old abandoned building or the remnants of an entire complex. In New Jersey, the chances are that it's been seen before by a lot of folks, but for you, it's newly discovered.

Imagine how the Taylors felt when they discovered their property bordered the former site of the Chester Furnace. Our love affair with the Furnace started about the first month we moved to Chester Township, along with years of research. That research proved difficult since the residents who could still remember the standing buildings and who played among the structures as children had "zero" interest in the history of the site. There are only a handful of photographs...after all, in bygone days who photographed an iron furnace? You took photographs of your family, your home and yourself standing by your car with an exotic roadside attraction in the background.

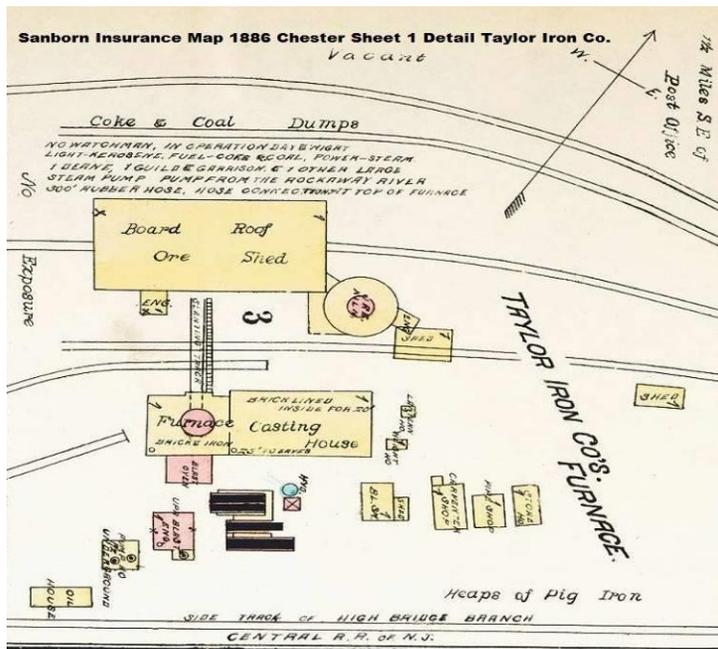


This map was made by Len Taylor and appeared in Larry Lowenthal's *Chester's Iron Heyday*. Ed Ng has added numbers corresponding to a narrative that was written by Len. I have also inserted the current location of Patriots' Path. (6) Stone Arch Bridge and (8) Dam are pictured in Bruce Clark's article.

CHESTER FURNACE MAP

RECONSTRUCTED FROM OLD RECORDS AND FIELD EVIDENCE COLLECTED IN 1969 AND 1978.

⁹ Much of the reference information about Lake Takene and area came from Len Taylor's "History of the House at 40 Furnace Rd. Chester Township, December 1, 1987. We very much appreciate and thank Lois Taylor for sharing the document with CHS.



The Taylor family has been over every inch of the furnace site. Rutgers University has excavated parts of the site and documented the anthropology of the artifacts. Yes, the anthropology, not the archaeology. A Scrapbook of History contains many mentions of the furnace. The Taylor map of the site ruins is in *Chester's Iron Heyday*. Coal and a few bricks from the site have been moved to the Taylor's property to save them from vandals or deterioration. The large number of iron artifacts that the Taylors found are on loan to Morris County for their use at the Cooper Mill or anywhere else they choose. And a book of poetry by W. Taylor, former superintendent of the operation, has been donated to the Chester Historical Society. We didn't know it

when we moved to Chester, but the Taylor ancestor who saved the booklet was a cousin to Superintendent Taylor. Somehow it seems appropriate that a latter day Taylor lives so close to the furnace. The site, which is on property owned by New Jersey, is gradually melting back into the landscape. Hunters, paintball groups, hikers, tours, horses and bikers have taken their toll. The area is going the way of most abandoned sites and will someday show no evidence at all of what was there. In the meantime, get out there and see it. Take the spring tour with the Taylors¹⁰. Grab this important piece of Chester area history and caress it. ■

Leila Topping – The Most Fascinating 20th Century Chester Woman

By Edward Ng

As it happens so many times when working in the CHS archives, the past catches up with the future. While inventorying one of CHS' many storage boxes, Sandy Jacobsen, Lois Taylor, and Elaine Hanington came upon correspondence and photos of Leila Topping. Who? I boldly (perhaps foolishly) propose that Leila Topping was the most fascinating Chester woman of the 20th Century. A bold claim but let me back it up with this brief biography:



Leila Topping - CHS Archives

Born in Chester 1869, she was educated at a Massachusetts Boarding School, then Mt. Holyoke College, Gracchell's Conservatory for piano. She had excellent training in Voice Culture. A career in teaching followed college. She was Director of Music at a southern Women's College and then Elizabeth College Conservatory of Music (Charlotte, NC). She returned north and had a noted career as a concert pianist, specializing in Russian music, "the American pianist with the soul of the Slav¹¹". She performed and lectured



Leila while at Boarding School in MA

¹⁰ CHS is planning to organize the Chester Furnace Tour in the autumn using research from Len Taylor, Bruce Clark, and others.

¹¹ 1922 Official Register of Women's Clubs page 194

extensively in New York and New Jersey. In addition she was a magazine writer, interested in "New Thought, modern psychology, and eugenics". She enjoyed "travel motoring", water sports, and was a nature lover. She was a devoted Presbyterian, advocated women's suffrage, and was a member of the Woman's Press Club of N.J. And finally, she was heiress to the Homestead Farm including her childhood home, Sunnyside, and the Isaac Corwin House that would become Larison's Turkey Farm Inn. This brings us back to the future as discussions are ongoing as to the future fate of Sunnyside and the Turkey Farm Inn.

Eliza Topping was born July 12, 1869 to Theodore Topping and Ellen (Nellie) Lyon. Eliza was called Lila but she preferred to spell the name "Leila" (I think this was a sign of things to come). Theodore Topping was a son of James Topping, the famed Chester cabinet maker, who died in 1874 at the age of 94¹². James Topping purchased the Isaac Corwin house (later the Larison's Turkey Farm Inn) and 53 acres. Leila's father died suddenly in 1873. The famed cabinet maker built a house next to the Isaac Corwin House for his widowed daughter-in-law and granddaughter. This house is now known as Sunnyside and was once "the grandest house in Chester"¹³. We don't have information about Leila's upbringing in Chester. As indicated in the preceding biography, she spent most of her adolescence in New England then taught in the South. We think she returned to the New Jersey area around 1914 to tend to ill family members. Her mother died in 1919. She lived in New York City where she was a teacher, writer, and gave piano recitals focusing on Russian music for which she is best known. Her passion and depth of knowledge of Russian music is described in this snippet from the journal "Musical America" (Vol. 33-34 2/21/1921 Page 408):



Leila teaching at Elizabeth College Charlotte NC



Leila Topping, American Pianist

Musical America Vol 33-34 Feb 21
1921, page 408

All-Russian recitals are unique in its aim of appealing to the dramatic sympathies of her audiences. She is thus led to give lecture-recitals rather than the recitals of pallid convention. Her list of offerings includes "The Folk Music of Russia," under which title she seeks to convey an adequate idea of the primitive music of the Russian Slavs, the lyrics and folk-songs of the peasantry; "Liturgical Music of Russia," the influence of the orthodox church on music and character, with a comparison of ancient and modern forms; "Stories and Selections from the Russian Operas," and "Russian Master-composers and tone poets," the aims and achievements of the reactionary group, as distinguished from the operatic nationalists, and their influence on contemporary composers and art music of to-day. The "Russian Tone pictures" program is precluded with a résumé of these various forms and influences. If the pioneer is the truest type of Americanism, then surely Miss Topping is a full-blooded American. Plenty of people have played Russian music, more than a few have even lectured on their impressions of Russia without ever having seen it (Miss Topping is frank to say that she has not visited it, except by way of imagination)¹⁴ ; but surely hers is in the last degree a very personal synthesis of scientific knowledge and individual taste.

Leila's letters that we have in the archives are effusive thank you

¹² Much of the information on the Topping family comes from the Historic American Buildings Survey's written and descriptive data from the Isaac Corwin House. HABS-NJ-628.

¹³ Chester Township Historic Sites Survey 1986

¹⁴ Frances Greenidge writes in A Scrapbook of Hisotry - Chester, New Jersey that Leila travelled to Russia. However this source quotes her as saying that she only travelled in her imagination. This makes sense given that World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution would have made it difficult for her to travel to Russia during her recital career.

and appreciation letters from a number of organizations where she performed, validating the description in "Musical America". 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. April 21, 1920.



We don't know when she returned to Chester from living in New York City, but the Historic American Buildings Survey historian interviewed Leila as the owner of the Isaac Corwin House in August 1939. She died later that year. Frances Greenidge wrote in 1974 in A Scrapbook of History, "Miss Leila Topping is still remembered with affection in Chester". We don't have the details, but I'm sure she was a force in Chester. Six years after her death, Willis Larison purchased the property from Leila's heirs and the Larison's Turkey Farm Inn history began. Discussions are underway as how to best preserve and repurpose Sunnyside and the Isaac Corwin House / Larison's Turkey Farm Inn. Stay Tuned to this developing story. ▣

Images from December 2014 CHS Holiday Party

The CHS Holiday party was graciously hosted by Louise Costikyan at what was historically called the "Goss House". Though much modified, this house has a long history dating from the pre Revolutionary War period when it was one of four Chester strong houses or "Forts"¹⁵. As you can see from these images, Louise's house was much more elegant and comfortable than a fort! Thank you very much Louise, for a fabulous, educational, delicious, and social afternoon!!!



Living room discussion of house history with dessert



Louise and Joan chat



The Costikyan "Fort" at sunset

Where to Find Future Program Information

See upcoming programs on our website historicchesternj.com or watch for our emails and postcards.

CHS Officers: President & Archives – Ed Ng Vice President – John Pfaff Treasurer – Anita Rhodes
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Pictures by Ed Ng except as noted. If you have stories or pictures to share with us, please contact us.

¹⁵ Frances Greenidge, A Scrapbook of History – Chester, New Jersey , page 26.