

The Chester Historical Society's



Dear CHS Members and Friends, happy New Year. The December Newsletter picks up from our June Newsletter which had Acts One and Two of the history of the 150+ year-old Black River Playhouse. We took an intermission after the Black River Playhouse was condemned by Chester Borough for health and safety violations. We complete that saga in the first article of this newsletter. Our second story commemorates the end of the Great War and the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Armistice. This story is a follow-up to the October 2014 Newsletter article and provides more information about how the "Sons of Chester," Albert Lambert and Roy Thomas, served and died. The third article recounts the research that Michele Sacerdoti has done on Captain James Tomkins. Michele's outreach to CHS was serendipitous as the CHS has a portrait of Captain Tomkins and information about his life in Chester. We finish the newsletter with a summary of the Annual Meeting which was held at the Community Presbyterian Church. CHS thanks Pastor Chris Scrivens for his history narrative and the Community Presbyterian Church for hosting us.

**Save the Dates: February 17 and March 31: details at the end of the newsletter**

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**The Incredible Journey of the Black River Playhouse – Acts 3 & 4**

**Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Chester Theatre Group (CTG)**

By Edward Ng – Chester Historical Society



Flashback: here is what happened at the end of **Act 2: You Can't Fight City Hall:**

By 1973, CTG had done 40 productions in their playhouse, however as in any melodrama, the future wasn't all smooth sailing. Rats did the theatre in! After the Sing Out West Morris

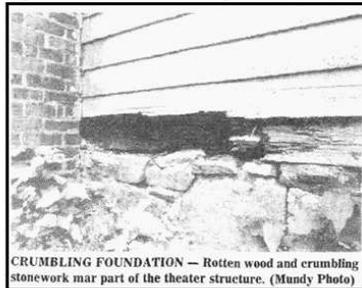
musical group performed, a member contacted the Chester Borough authorities to report he had seen rats. This report prompted sanitary, fire, safety, and structural inspections by Borough officials. Numerous violations were observed and the playhouse was closed and condemned. The fire chief declared the building a "firetrap." Penny Hoadley, CTG president, protested the closure saying that repairs were being planned.



**Youth Says He Saw Rats**

## Theater Seen As Firetrap

CHESTER — "A firetrap" — this was the verdict given to the Borough Council by Fire Chief John Galayda about the Black River Playhouse on Grove Street, home of the Chester Theater Group.



**CRUMBLING FOUNDATION** — Rotten wood and crumbling stonework mar part of the theater structure. (Mundy Photo)

## Council Is Firm On Theater Closing

CHESTER — In response to pleas from members of the Black River Playhouse to allow the theater building to re-open on a limited basis, the Chester Borough Council on July 18 reiterated its position that the opening of the condemned playhouse is entirely up to the discretion of the building, health, and fire inspectors.

Conover, that the theater building violated the fire and health codes.

Alan D. Rubenstein of Mount Arlington, attorney and former president of the theater, contended that the theater had made the necessary improvements to comply with the codes that were violated.

Furthermore, CTG were preparing to stage the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, *Carousel*, and a summer program for high school and college students. July 5, 1973, was a dark day for CTG, the Council voted to confirm the condemnation. The Borough Council ruled that the playhouse could only reopen after all structural, safety, and sanitary repairs were made.<sup>1</sup>



### Act 3: The Show Must Go On

CTG immediately started repairs, replacing the septic tank and broken woodwork, installing a new stairway and railings, stabilizing the chimney, replacing worn electrical wiring, removing flammable

**Black River Playhouse**  
Presents  
**CAROUSEL**  
by Rodgers & Hammerstein  
at  
**WATERLOO VILLAGE**  
**MUSIC TENT**  
Stanhope, N.J.  
1.3 miles west of Route 206 on Waterloo Road  
Fri. Sat. Sun. Aug. 10, 11, 12  
Thurs. Fri. Sat. Aug. 16, 17, 18  
All performances at 8:30 PM  
Adults \$3.75 — Students \$3.25  
Ticket Reservations: call 879-5230 or 879-6427  
Group Rates: call 879-7510



**PROVIDING EXCITEMENT** in the Chester Theatre Group's youth-oriented production of "Carousel" are Harriet Whitmeyer of Far Hills as Carrie Pipperidge and Steve Larchuck of Dover as Jigger Craigen. The Rodgers and Hammerstein musical will be staged at Waterloo Village, Stanhope, on Friday, Aug. 10, through Sunday, Aug. 12, and again the following weekend, Aug. 16 through Aug. 18. Tickets may be purchased at the Waterloo Music Festival tent for any performance.

**"The Chester Theatre Group is without question earning the respect and admiration of many new people who have come to see "Carousel" and have been impressed."**

curtains and drapes, and installing new fire extinguishers. An exterminator was hired to remove any vermin, but no rats were found. In the meantime, Waterloo Village graciously

<sup>1</sup> The Council ruling, the *Carousel* ad, and the play image are from the Observer Tribune, July 12, 1973.

offered CTG use of their Music Festival Tent to stage *Carousel*. Set construction and rehearsals shifted to Stanhope and *Carousel* opened on August 10, for a two week run. The Observer Tribune's theatre reviewer wrote, "few will now deny that crisis has turned to triumph."<sup>2</sup>



CONCLUDING THIS WEEKEND at the Black River Playhouse is the Chester Theatre Group presentation of the musical comedy, "Mame." Penny Hoadley plays Auntie Mame, with Bob Lyons cast as Lindsay and Penny Morey as Vera. Performances will be given through Saturday, Jan. 15.

**Chester Theatre Group  
Stages Musical 'Mame'**

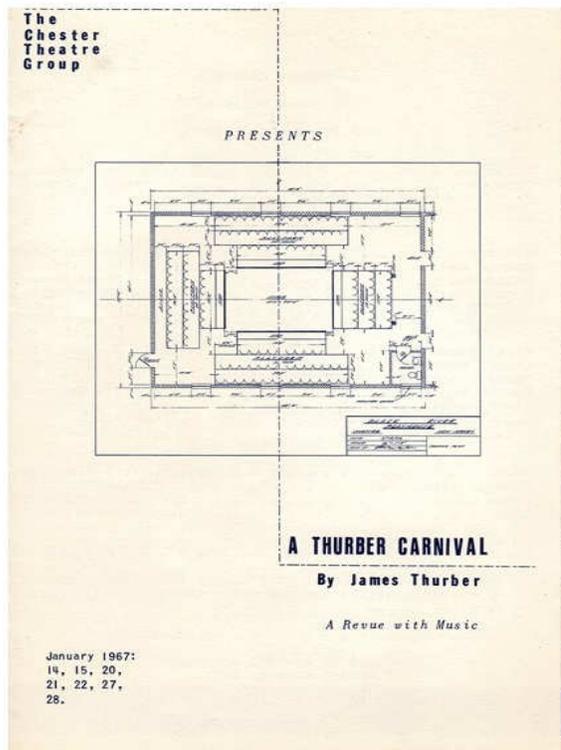
Playhouse repairs were made to the satisfaction of the Borough officials and the theatre reopened in January, 1974, with a production of *Mame*. Appropriately, the play starred Penny Hoadley in the title role.

No history of the Black River Playhouse would be complete without highlighting the 50 years of art from the Chester Theatre Group. Since 1959, the Chester Theatre Group has presented over 250 productions. Which plays to showcase with images in this article? I asked the Chester Theatre Group to provide a list of 5 of their "favorite" plays. They nominated 10. Six plays had the fortunate combination of making the favorites list and having good archival photos. I added two more plays to bookend the historical timeline

of the theatre. The first bookend was *A Thurber Carnival* which was the first CTG play in the Black River Playhouse in 1967. The concluding bookend is Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. This was the inaugural play from CTG and performed at the bare stage at the Williamson School in 1959. *Our Town* was performed again in 2017 in CTG's 50<sup>th</sup> season. It was a wonderful homage to the 50 year tenure of CTG and also to Chester, our town. Thanks to Diane Butler for providing the play synopses which follow.

**1967 A  
Thurber  
Carnival**

presents  
16 skits  
derived  
from  
James  
Thurber's  
New  
Yorker  
stories.



**A Thurber Carnival - Fables**

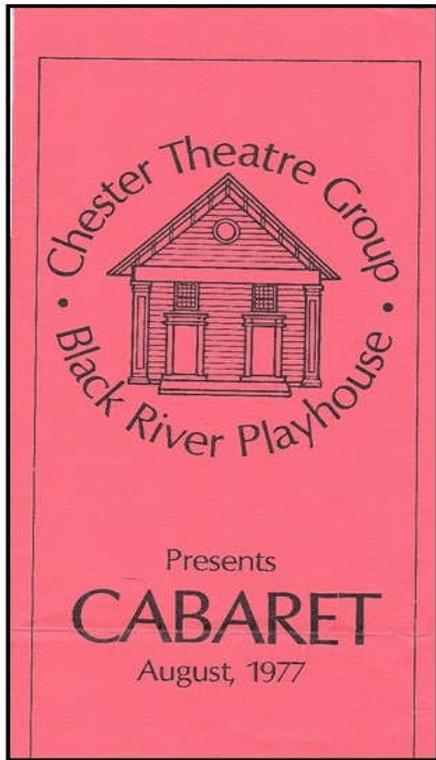


**Left side  
Front to back:  
Sonia Bowyer  
Frank Homer  
Linc Edwards  
Shirley Carroll**

**Right side  
Front to back:  
Ed Teichert (facing back)  
Judy Pflug  
Edith Del Peschio  
Dick Conway  
Judy Cook  
Paul Goldschmidt**

<sup>2</sup> Observer Tribune, August 16, 1973

1977



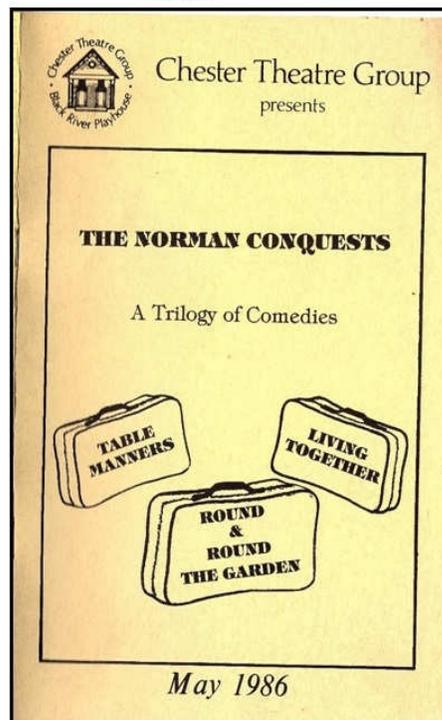
Judy Kellogg as Sally Bowles

**1977 – Cabaret** is set in 1931 Berlin with the Nazi's rising to power and foreshadows the darkness to come. *Cabaret* focuses on the nightlife at the seedy Kit Kat Klub, and revolves around young American writer Cliff Bradshaw and his relationship with the English performer Sally Bowles. The quirky and omniscient "Emcee" steals

the show. *Cabaret* was successful on stage and screen with music by John Kander, lyrics by Fred Ebb, based on a book by Joe Masteroff.

**1986 & 2007 - The Norman Conquests** is a trilogy of plays written in 1973 by British playwright Alan Ayckbourn. Each of the plays depicts the same six characters over the same weekend in a different part of a house: dining room - *Table Manners*; outdoors in the garden - *Round & Round*; living room - *Living Together* (image to the right). Ayckbourn is one of CTG's favorite playwrights.

1986



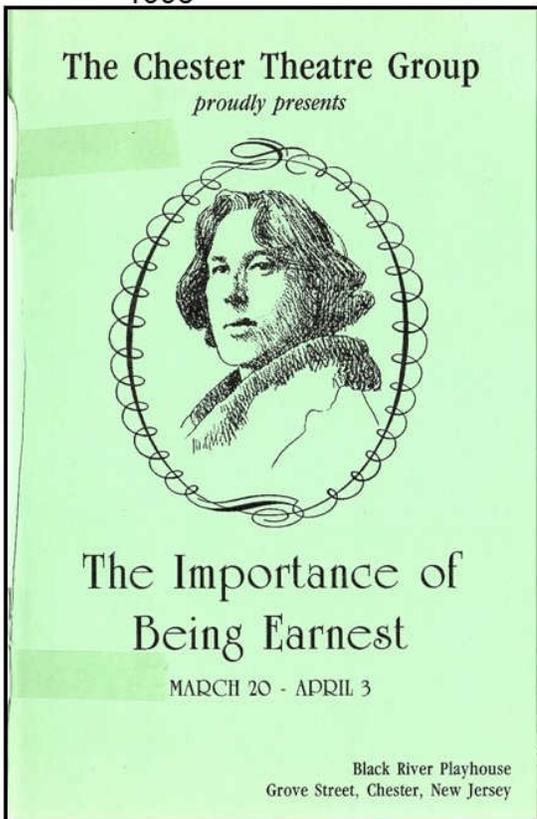
Alan Ayckbourn

2007



Chris Mortenson as Norman, Ruth Morley as Annie, and Roxanna Wagner as Ruth in Living Together

1993

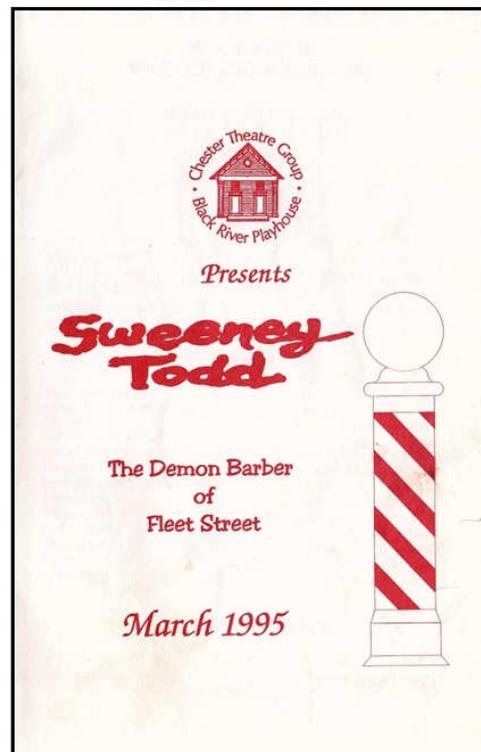


Randy Hertzog as Algernon Moncrieff

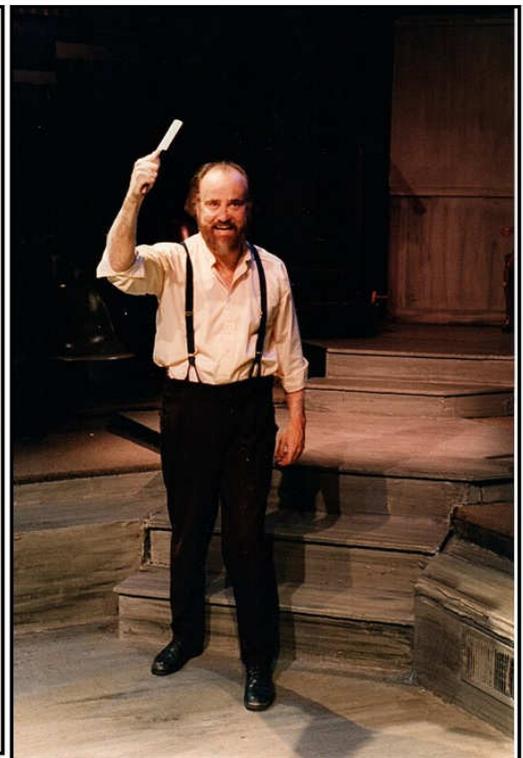
**1993 – The Importance of Being Earnest** was Oscar Wilde's most successful play. It is a farcical comedy in which the protagonists maintain fictitious persona to escape burdensome Victorian social obligations. The play also excoriates class prejudices with biting humor.

1995

**1995 - Sweeney Todd** - This musical is the unsettling tale of a Victorian era barber who returns home to London after 15 years of exile and swears vengeance on the entire human race. He exacts this revenge by murdering as many people as he can, while his business associate, Mrs. Lovett, bakes the bodies into meat pies and sells them to the unsuspecting public.

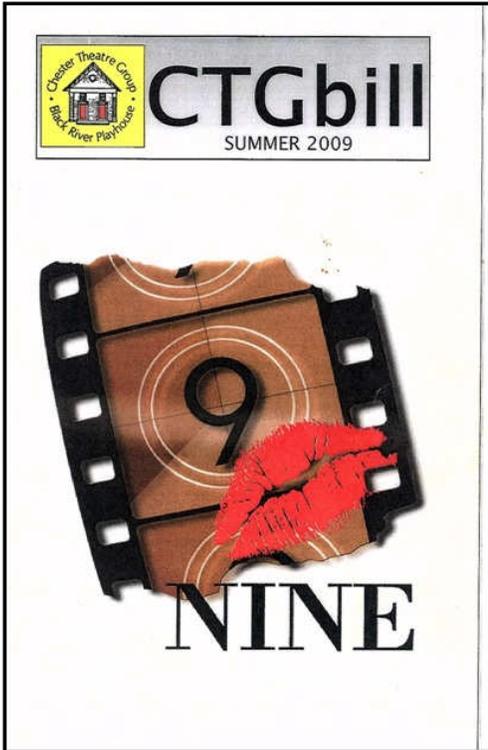


[Stephen Sondheim](#) and [Hugh Wheeler](#).

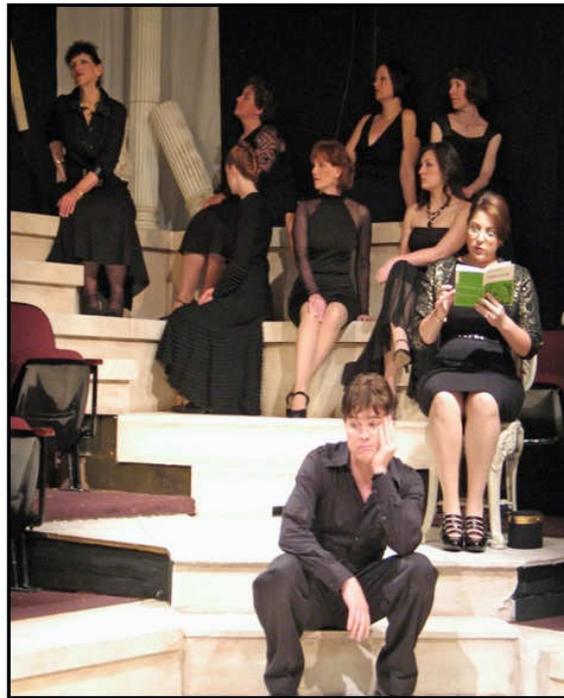


Rick McElhiney as Sweeney Todd

2009



Book by Maury Yeston



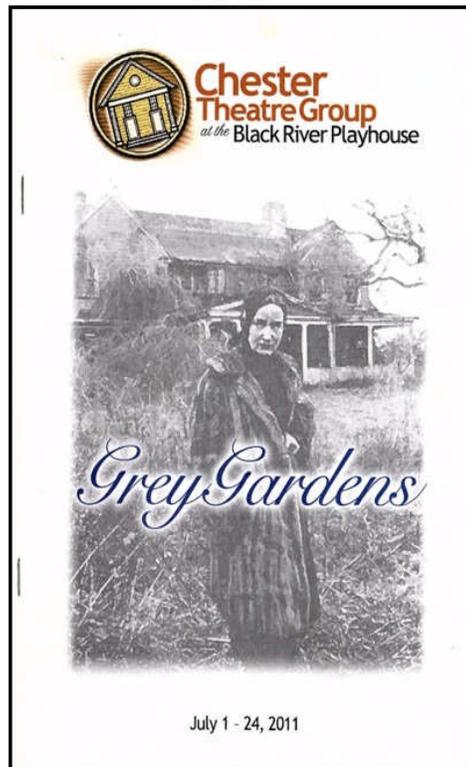
Jeff Jackson as Guido Contini

**2009 – *Nine*** is based on Italian director Federico Fellini's 8 ½. Film director Guido Contini is dreading his imminent 40th birthday and facing a midlife crisis, which is blocking his creative impulses and entangling him in a web of romantic difficulties in early 1960s Venice.

**2011 - *Grey Gardens***

*Gardens* is a musical based on the Albert and David Maysies' 1975 documentary of the same title. Their documentary chronicles the complicated dynamics of a mother and daughter (aunt and cousin of Jacqueline Kennedy) through their progression from rich and socially polished aristocrats to their isolated existence in a cat-infested, health-violation-plagued mansion.

2011

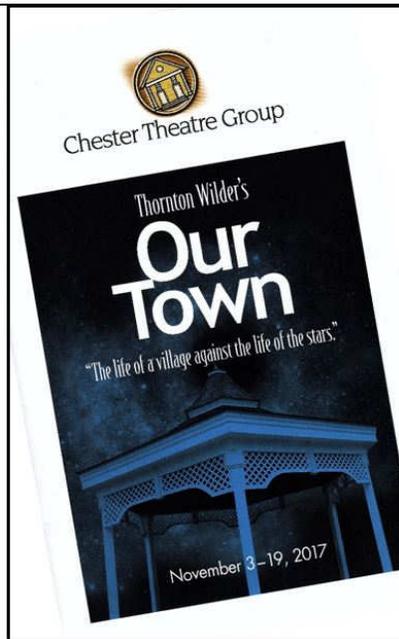


Doug Wright, Scott Frankel, & Michael Korie



Barbara Haag as a young Big Edie

**2017 – Our Town** A landmark in American drama, Thornton Wilder's 1938 Pulitzer Prize-winning *Our Town* uses the story of a small town (Grover's Corners, New Hampshire) in order to tell us the story of every town, the whole world over. Wilder delivers universal truths about what it means to be human: our love, our bonds to each other and the phenomenal experience of simply being alive. First performed at the Williamson School in 1959, this was the first production by the Chester Theatre Group and was lovingly revived in 2017 as part of CTG's 50th Anniversary Season. If anyone has the program from the 1959 production, may CHS borrow it?



Will Roper as George, Jackie Jacobi as Emily, Sarah Henley as the minister.

We are fortunate to have this image of the actresses playing Rebecca in the first and the latest productions of *Our Town* (Thank you Paula Roper). Alexa Lauren Yudoff played Rebecca in 2017 and CHS member Helen Jones played the role in 1959. Rebecca had the most thought provoking lines of the play in this dialog with her brother George:

Rebecca 2017 and Rebecca 1959



Alexa Lauren Yudoff and Helen Jones

**Act 1 - REBECCA:**

*I never told you about that letter Jane Crofut got from her minister when she was sick. He wrote Jane a letter and on the envelope the address was like this: It said: Jane Crofut; The Crofut Farm; Grover's Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America.*

**GEORGE:**

*What's funny about that?*

**REBECCA:**

*But listen, it's not finished: the United States of America; Continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the Mind of God that's what it said on the envelope.*



**Act 4: Break a Leg ...for the next 50 years!!!**

I wish to thank CTG for their help and archives in making this article possible. Special thanks go to Diane Butler, Peg Hill, Penny Hoadley, Lauri MacMillan, and Jeff Jackson. ▣

## The Great War: Remembering Roy and Albert

### By Edward Ng – Chester Historical Society

The folks of Chester responded patriotically to WWI as Frances Greenidge writes: *People gladly did without – “for the boys over there”; everybody sang stirring war songs with fervor, and throughout the land was the belief that this really was the “war to end war”. The women of Chester met regularly in the Woman’s Club room to roll bandages and do other Red Cross work...Chester went way “over the top” in every Liberty Bond drive...* From the area went “Chester’s 46 Sons”. Among the 46, Albert Lambert and Roy Thomas were killed in 1918<sup>3</sup>. I felt compelled to tell their stories, to provide context. How did U-Boats, Bolsheviks, Pershing’s pride, and Stormtroopers coalesce to doom Roy and Albert? In 2018, we commemorated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of WWI and the November 11, 1918 armistice. It is a fitting time to honor their memories.

Our story starts the year before. 1917 was a whirlwind of change for many Americans. With the resumption of German U-Boat attacks on American shipping, the US declared war in April. The Selective Service Act was passed in May, registration for the draft started in June, and the first draft was held in July<sup>4</sup>. On July 12, President Wilson called out the entire National Guard for active service<sup>5</sup>. In Russia, Tsar Nicholas II abdicated in March. The Bolsheviks came to power in October and withdrew Russia from the war. Freed from the Eastern Front, the German Army shifted many forces to the Western Front. The German army, deploying Stormtrooper tactics, defeated the Italian Army at Caporetto in November 1917. What

was once a three front war is reduced to one: the Western Front which stretched from the English Channel to Switzerland – a span of almost 500 miles.

Albert Lambert registered for the draft on June 5, 1917. His draft registration card provides helpful information. He was 22, born in Califon, a farm laborer working for George Schuyler in Vernoy, single, of medium height, and had dark brown hair.

After finishing his training, Albert was assigned to the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in December, 1917<sup>6</sup>. The 30<sup>th</sup> left Camp Merritt, NJ, and arrived in France on April 4, 1918. The 30<sup>th</sup> along with the 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry regiments formed the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division. In part due to US Gen. Pershing’s desire to have a consolidated US force rather than being amalgamated among the French and British forces, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division did not arrive at the Front until May, 1918. They were positioned with

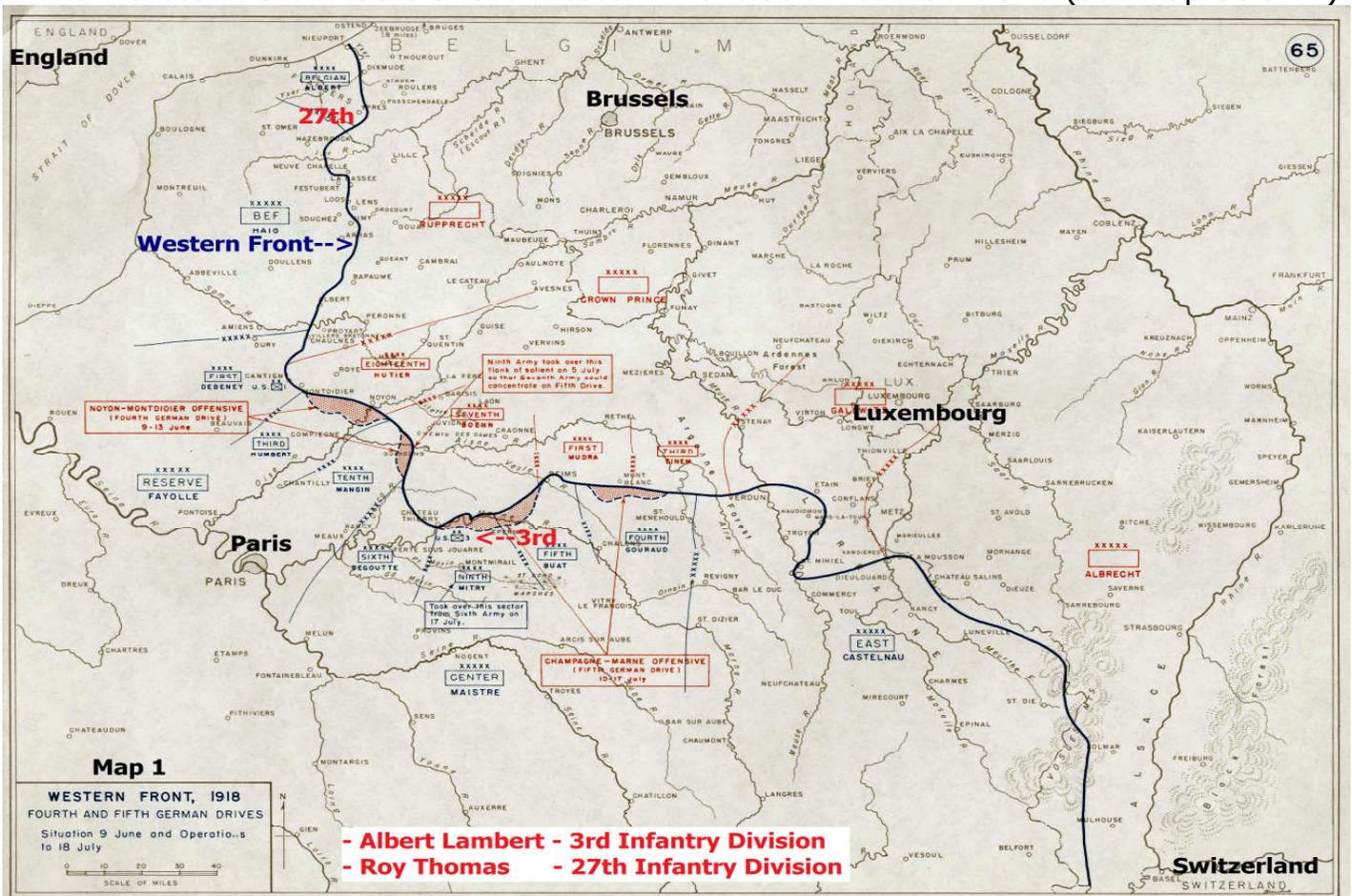
<sup>3</sup> Frances Greenidge in her book [Chester NJ - A Scrapbook of History](#) recounts Chester’s patriotism and the story of “Chester’s 46 Sons” who went to war and the two who died fighting on page 135.

<sup>4</sup> <https://history.army.mil/books/AMH-V2/AMH%20V2/chapter1.htm> is a good reference to the US in WWI.

<sup>5</sup> <https://dmna.ny.gov/historic/reghist/wwi/infantry/27thInfDiv/27thInfDivMain.htm>

<sup>6</sup> NJ State Death Card [https://wwwnet-dos.state.nj.us/DOS\\_ArchivesDBPortal/WWICardDetails.aspx?CardID=1648](https://wwwnet-dos.state.nj.us/DOS_ArchivesDBPortal/WWICardDetails.aspx?CardID=1648)

French forces in the middle of the Western Front 60 miles from Paris (see Map below<sup>7</sup> ).



Albert would be involved, but not survive one of the most dramatic American battles of WWI as illustrated in DA Poster 21-42 of fighting near Mézy, France, July 1918 (US Army Center of Military History).<sup>8</sup>

The US Army History of WWI provides the following narrative: *On the early morning hours of July 15 the Germans began their attack against the 3d Division with a creeping barrage followed shortly by an assault-crossing of the Marne. The weight of the attack came against Col. Edmund Butts' 30th Infantry and Col. Ulysses Grant McAlexander's 38th Infantry.*



*After heavy fighting in the morning, when the 30th Infantry inflicted horrendous casualties on the Germans, Butts' men were forced back to a line along the hills where they had stopped the Germans. McAlexander faced a more precarious position when the adjacent French*

<sup>7</sup> Battlefield maps in this article were adapted from the 1950 maps originally produced by the Dept. of Art and Military Engineering at the US Military Academy. <https://www.firstworldwar.com/maps/westernfront.htm>. The Western Front is shown as the black wavy diagonal line. The German forces are outlined and cross hatched in red. The Allied forces are outlined and crosshatched in blue. Southern extensions of red-cross hatching show the advance of the German forces known as the Fourth and Fifth German Drives on July 18, 1918.

<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/3rd\\_Infantry\\_Division\\_\(United\\_States\)#/media/File:The\\_Rock\\_of\\_the\\_Marne.\\_DA\\_Poster\\_21-42.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/3rd_Infantry_Division_(United_States)#/media/File:The_Rock_of_the_Marne._DA_Poster_21-42.jpg)

division hastily retreated, leaving the 38th Infantry's right flank exposed. Turning some of the regiment to defend that flank, McAlexander also had to deal with a penetration of his main line. Although fighting on three sides, the riflemen and machine gunners of the 38th Infantry held, earning the sobriquet Rock of the Marne. By the end of the day the German attack against the 3d Division had been stopped. Between the 30th and 38th Infantries the Americans had defeated six regiments from two German divisions. One German 1,700-man regiment was so badly cut up that the German leaders could only find 150 survivors at nightfall on July 15.<sup>9</sup>

A second account provides more detail about the 30<sup>th</sup>, before and after the battle: At 4 a.m. on the 15th of July, 1918 the German forces began to cross the Marne River.... The Germans laid down a barrage on the 30th's position that they thought surely no one could live through and, the moment the German troops crossed the Marne River they encountered heavy resistance the length of the 30th Infantry's lines. ... The losses of the 30th Infantry in officers, men, and animals was very heavy, not from the infantry attack but, from the preparation fire. It was for this stand that the 30th Infantry was decorated on January 3rd, 1919, by the French with the Croix de Guerre with Palm, with the following citation:

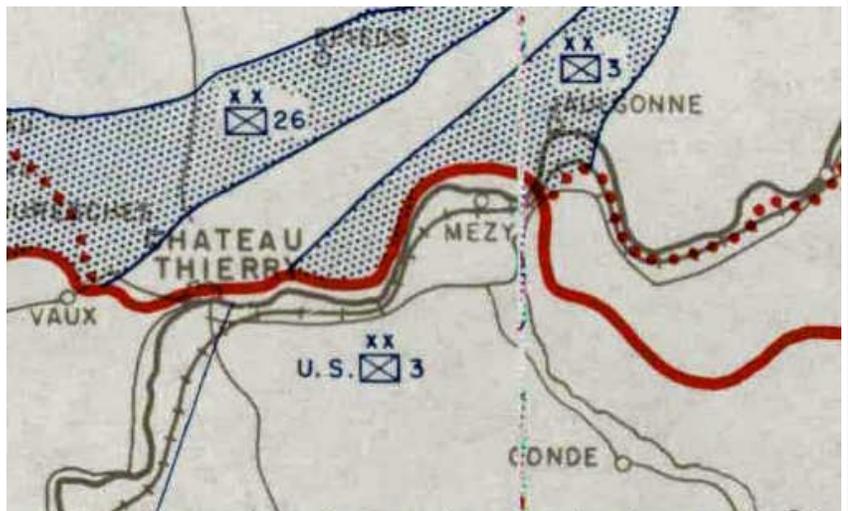
"An old regiment of the American Army, which, under the energetic and able command of its chief, Colonel E.L. Butts, showed itself faithful to its traditions in sustaining the principal shock of the German attack of the 15th July 1918 on the front of the Corps to which it was attached. Under a most violent bombardment which caused heavy losses, it held in spite of all the enemy assault, and reestablished integrally, its positions, taking more than two hundred prisoners."

The casualties sustained by the U.S. 30th Infantry Regiment for the Champagne-Marne Defensive are as follows: 25 officers and 1,400 men<sup>10</sup>

Albert Lambert was one of the 1,400 American casualties. His death card states he died "15 July 1918 Marne



River-near Mézy"<sup>11</sup>. He is buried in the Fairmount Cemetery in Hunterdon County<sup>12</sup>.



On July 18, 1918, the 3rd Division (U.S. XX 3) is shown just south of the Marne River (black line) and SE of Mézy where Albert died. The red line is the Western Front which the 3rd valiantly held.

For every action there is a reaction. For each offensive thrust there is a defensive counter. The success of the Bolshevik revolution freed the German army from the Russian front and they hurled those divisions against the center of the Western Front. Though Albert perished, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division and the French forces withstood the onslaught. Seeing the failure of the German breakthrough, the Allies positioned forces to take the offensive against the now overstretched German army in the northern, Belgian portion of the Western Front.

<sup>9</sup> <https://history.army.mil/books/AMH-V2/PDF/Chapter01.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.tapatalk.com/groups/the\\_trench\\_line/u-s-30th-infantry-regiment-in-world-war-i-t1874.html](https://www.tapatalk.com/groups/the_trench_line/u-s-30th-infantry-regiment-in-world-war-i-t1874.html)

<sup>11</sup> [https://wwwnet-dos.state.nj.us/DOS\\_ArchivesDBPortal/WWICardDetails.aspx?CardID=1648](https://wwwnet-dos.state.nj.us/DOS_ArchivesDBPortal/WWICardDetails.aspx?CardID=1648) There are at least three errors on the card: "Megy" should read "Mézy", his mother's name is "Katherine" and his mother's address should be "NJ" not "Pa".

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/30143633>

When I researched Roy Thomas for the October 2014 Newsletter<sup>13</sup>, I did not find his draft card nor his death card. It was also odd that he was 35-36 years old when he died and his rank was corporal. A 2016 article by Lt. Col. (Ret) Brian J. Murphy<sup>14</sup> helped solve the mystery and additional research provided clarifying information.

Roy was not drafted since he was already serving with the New York National Guard participating in Gen. John J. Pershing's pursuit of Pancho Villa. Murphy writes: *Roy was a long time member of the 71st New York Infantry and served with his regiment along the Mexican border from 27 June 1916 through 6 September 1916.* When President Wilson activated the National Guard in July 1917, Roy's regiment, renamed the 105<sup>th</sup>, was incorporated into the army's 27<sup>th</sup> Division. The 105<sup>th</sup> service has been well documented and we have an image (right) of Roy as a corporal in Company L<sup>15</sup>. After intensive training in South Carolina, the division convoyed to France and underwent further training from British troops<sup>16</sup>.



On August 21, the 27<sup>th</sup> Division, including the 105<sup>th</sup> Regiment was positioned in the Dickebusch Sector, in Belgium, southwest of the town of Ypres<sup>17</sup>. Holding the front line, repelling raids, making raids and patrols, the 105<sup>th</sup> came under artillery and machine gun fire from enemy positions directed from Kemmel Hill. As shown in the map on the next page<sup>18</sup> the 105<sup>th</sup> was very near the front. Historian Mitchell Yockleson describes the situation: *At first, the Germans were unaware that Americans had entered the sector opposite them, but according to a prisoner interrogated at 27th Division headquarters, this changed when the rifle fire became "more brisk and haphazard." When asked to elaborate, the soldier from the German 93d Infantry Regiment explained that soldiers "who have been in the war for some time only fire individually when they are sure they have a target, whereas new troops are apt to fire more or less constantly at night, whether or not they have a target." The considerable shooting and muzzle flashes allowed the Germans to better pinpoint the American line of advance. Once they recognized that untested American troops were opposing them, it became a daily ritual to try their mettle by harassing them with artillery fire, lobbing shells into back areas to hit crossroads and villages.*<sup>19</sup>

That daily ritual would have deadly consequences.

<sup>13</sup> Chester and the Great War: Correction Needed! In the Chester Historical Society Newsletter, October 2014. The main information source was from FindaGrave: <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/53812239/roy-t-thomas>. His headstone is shown on page 12.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/corporal-roy-thomas-company-l-3rd-battalion-105th-murphy-mpa-mmas/>

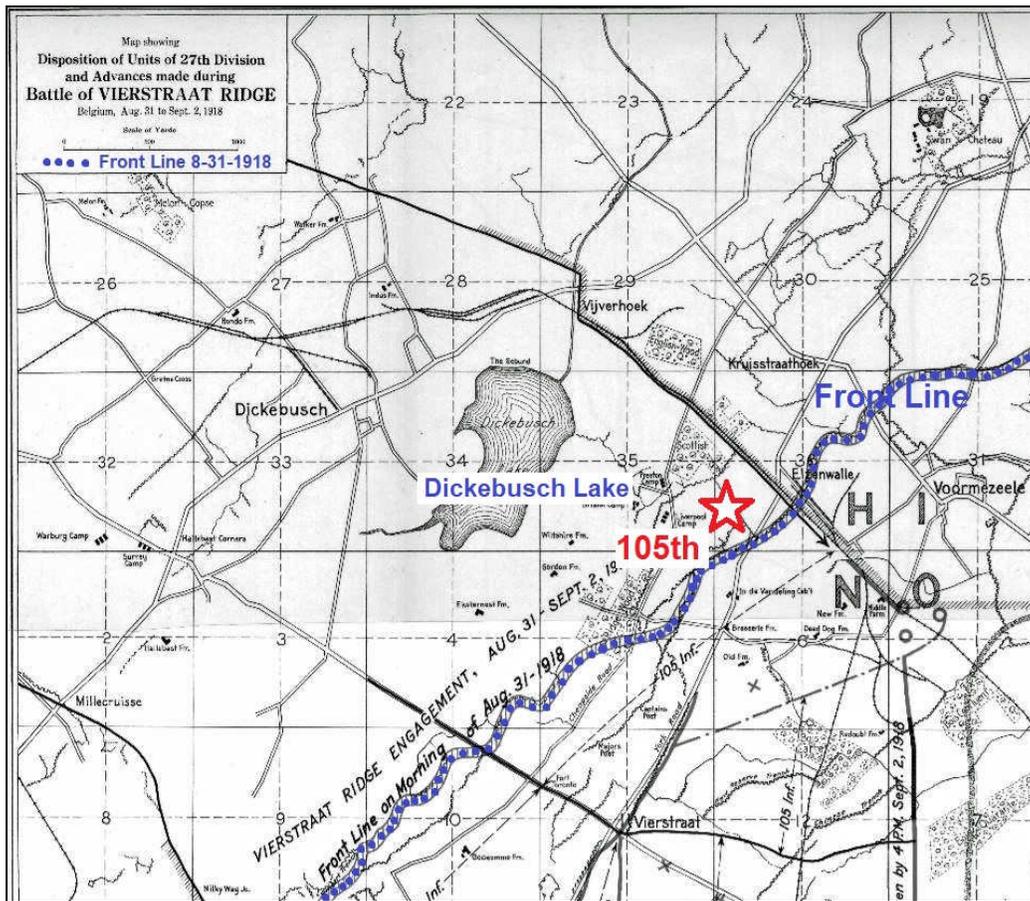
<sup>15</sup> <https://archive.org/details/roster105thinfan00philrich/page/n113>

<sup>16</sup> <https://armyhistory.org/borrowed-soldiers-the-american-27th-and-30th-divisions-and-the-british-army-on-the-ypres-front-august-september-1918/>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.oryansroughnecks.org/engagements.html>

<sup>18</sup> [https://dmna.ny.gov/historic/reghist/wwi/infantry/27thInfDiv/StoryOfThe27th\\_vol1\\_Chap14.pdf](https://dmna.ny.gov/historic/reghist/wwi/infantry/27thInfDiv/StoryOfThe27th_vol1_Chap14.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> <https://armyhistory.org/borrowed-soldiers-the-american-27th-and-30th-divisions-and-the-british-army-on-the-ypres-front-august-september-1918/>



The War Diary<sup>20</sup> for the 105<sup>th</sup> Infantry had this nonchalant entry for August 26, 1918:

#### AUGUST 26<sup>TH</sup> 105<sup>th</sup> Infantry

**1<sup>st</sup> Battalion ... Report activity by enemy with trench mortars between 4:45 to 6:30 A.M. Establishment of observation posts on the right front at N.5.c4.6. and N.5.c7.8. Visiting patrols work between right and left forward companies at intervals of fifteen minutes. The left forward company sent out patrol of six men to locate snipers. A post was located and found vacated... The patrol was sent out from 11 P.M. to 1:15 A.M.**

**2d Battalion ... Report heavy shelling around battalion headquarters.**

**3d Battalion ... Usual routine in trench work. Four casualties (one killed, three wounded)**

I believe that Roy was the "one killed" though not named specifically, the date and the 3d battalion matches. Five days later the 105<sup>th</sup> would help win the battle for Vierstraat Ridge which would drive the German forces from Kemmel Hill.

Roy was initially buried in Abeele Aerodrome Military Cemetery, Belgium. After the war, Roy's remains were repatriated to New Jersey and he was reinterred in German Valley Rural Cemetery, Long Valley, New Jersey.

*Two sons of Chester -- Convoyed to France  
Different routes -- To meet the same fate  
Albert perishing near Paris -- Roy dying near Dickebusch  
Rock of the Marne -- Victor at Vierstraat  
Sons of Chester always* ■



<sup>20</sup> <https://archive.org/details/storyof27thdivis02oryauoft/page/774>

## Captain James Tomkins – A Request for Genealogy Help from Italy

By Edward Ng – Chester Historical Society with Research from Michele Sacerdoti

CHS regularly receives requests to help with genealogical research. We don't have a dedicated genealogy person(s) so our assistance is often quite basic. However, sometimes the stars align and a cornucopia of information comes together – the genealogy seeker and especially the CHS researcher are gobsmacked. Michele Sacerdoti from northern Italy had an extensive family genealogy with significant Chester connections, particularly a “Captain James Tomkins”.



His family recalled seeing a portrait of Captain Tomkins and his wife at a relative's house in New Jersey many years ago. Could CHS help him find the portrait and provide additional information? We did have a portrait of Captain Tompkins (note different spelling) and we thought, of his wife<sup>21</sup>. When this portrait was donated to CHS, background research was conducted and the most useful information was from Frances Greenidge's book Chester New Jersey – A Scrapbook of History (pages 67-68):

*CAPT. JAMES TOMPKINS, great-grandfather of R. Parkhurst Dickerson of Pleasant Hill Road, who had come from New York City in 1831 and bought 143 acres, including the "Stone House Farm" (above the present Dickerson garage). After living for three years in the "Stone House" (now gone) he built the present lovely Dickerson house. A floorboard in a bedroom tells the story: John Vandoren Architect - Robt Woodruff- Abm Vandoren- Journeyman – Caleb Osborn- William Woodruff Apprentice- Built for Capt. James Tompkins ... The Captain's eleven-year-old daughter Eliza had come to Chester to board with the Woodhull family while she attended school. The following year her brother, Floyd William Tompkins, came to work at the Woodhull farm, and the year after that, 1831, the Captain decided to settle on Pleasant Hill. **James Tompkins was a Sea Captain, and hanging in the Dickerson parlor is his portrait, painted in Calcutta.** (from the collections and recollections of R. Parkhurst Dickerson).*

However, Michele was seeking information on “Captain Tomkins” – Greenidge had spelled “Tompkins” with a “p”. Michele provided information showing that Greenidge's research had misspelled the surname. It was “Tomkins” and referred me to his monument at Pleasant Hill Cemetery – an imposing obelisk. The engraving under the anchor reads “**SAILOR THERE IS HOPE FOR THEE**” and the base is inscribed with “**CAPT. JAMES TOMKINS.**” and “**TOMKINS**”.



<sup>21</sup> The paintings are shown side-by-side. The Captain's painting is 20 1/4" by 24 3/4" and his wife's painting is 25 3/8" by 28 7/8".  
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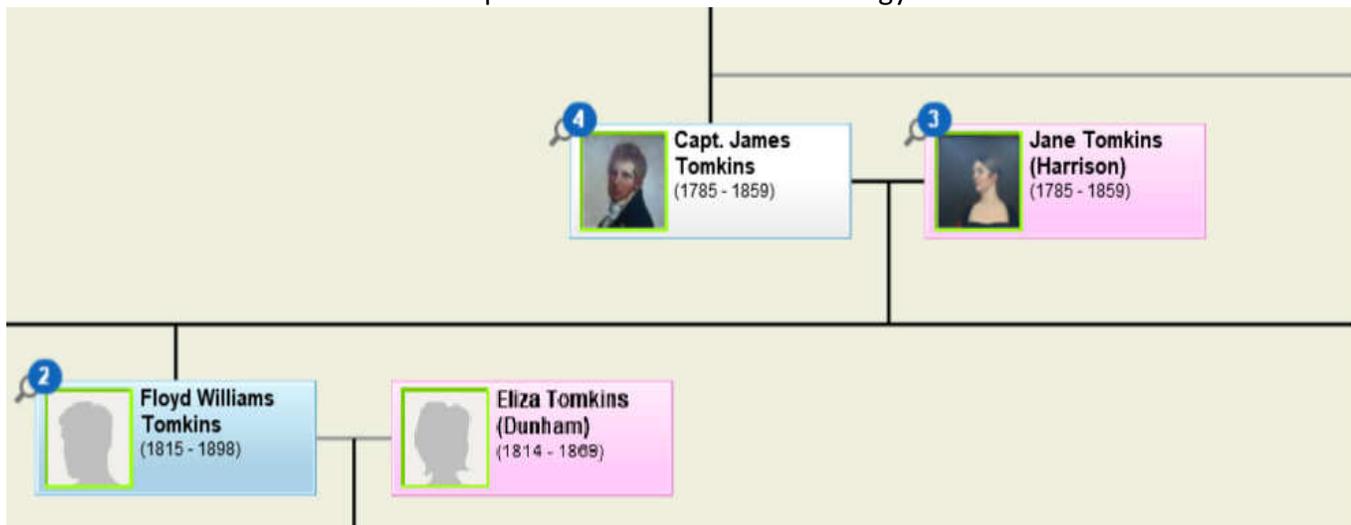
Michele also found in the British book The Naval Chronicle: Vol. 25 a reference<sup>22</sup> under "Marriages" that stated "Captain James Tomkins, of the Ship St. Michael, to Miss Jane Harrison, daughter of Mr. Harrison, attorney." His other sources indicated they were married on Sept. 24, 1810, in Liverpool, England (where the bride was born). That helped confirm that the second portrait donated to CHS was Jane Harrison. She is also buried at Pleasant Hill Cemetery. Michele thinks that the St. Michael might have been a Portuguese whaling ship commanded by Captain Tomkins when he visited Liverpool.

The webpage "Veterans Buried at Pleasant Hill Cemetery"<sup>23</sup>, shows only one person buried at the cemetery served in the War of 1812: "**James Tomkins, born: 3-2-1785 died: 3-15-1859 (loc. Sec A) Captain, US Navy**". Was the St. Michael the ship that Captain Tomkins commanded in the War of 1812? What type of ship was it? The St. Michael does not appear on a list of US Navy Ships from the War of 1812<sup>24</sup>. So it was probably not a warship.

In my brief and inconclusive research, I was only able to find one reference that could be germane: The Brig St. Michaels (notice the "s" at the end) sailed from Baltimore in February 1810 with a cargo of tobacco bound for Tonningen (now in Norway). However, subsequent damage forced the St. Michaels to land at Texel (now in North Holland, Netherlands) for repairs. Then complications occurred: a king abdicates, Napoleon Bonaparte swallows up another country, a secret treaty is signed, and the St. Michaels is sequestered in Amsterdam with no date for release<sup>25</sup>. It is only speculation to think that Captain Tomkins "escaped" and made his way to Liverpool to marry Jane Harrison in September. I think more research is needed before that history can be written.

Michele Sacerdoti has successfully created his genealogy back to his wife's grand-grand – grand-grand-father and mother and it is remarkable to be able to see their faces. ■

An Excerpt from the Michele's Genealogy Work



<sup>22</sup> <https://books.google.it/books?id=I3hscsSsOoMC&pg=PA86&lpg=PA86&dq=captain+james+tomkins+harrison&source=bl&ots=A-GqHLI4Pg&sig=PbNu9HbOwt2Vi9mH3I9iCoBkfk8&hl=en&sa=X#v=onepage&q=james%20tomkins&f=false>

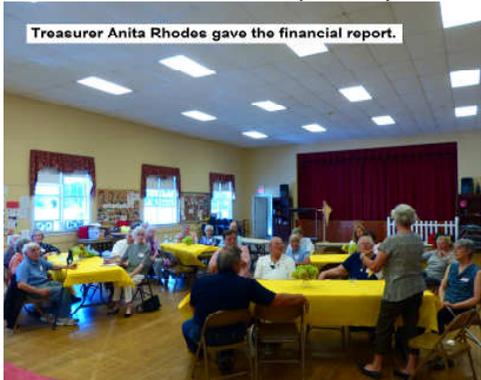
<sup>23</sup> <http://pleasanthillcemetery.org/veterans.htm>

<sup>24</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:War\\_of\\_1812\\_ships\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:War_of_1812_ships_of_the_United_States)

<sup>25</sup> <https://books.google.com/books?id=ihBCAAAACAAJ&q=St.+Michael#v=snippet&q=%22St.%20Michael%22&f=false> American State Papers. Documents Legislative and Executive Congress of the United States – Second Series Volume VI 1859 - Page 503

## CHS Annual Meeting – September 16, 2018

The 2018 CHS Annual Meeting and Picnic was held at the Community Presbyterian Church. We would like to thank the Church and Pastor Chris Scrivens for hosting us. The first order of business was to thank Elaine Hanington for serving as Recording Secretary for over 15 years. Thank you Elaine! Edward Ng was re-elected as President and Jim Whelpley was elected as Recording Secretary. Alison Dahl, Marla Jackson, Meryl Carmel, Ed Hanington and Elaine Hanington were elected as Trustees. Congratulations! Anita Rhodes gave the financial update. Thanks to Alison Dahl for organizing the lunch; Elaine Hanington for handling the RSVP's, to John Pfaff for liaising with CPC, and to all for your hard work. After the business meeting was adjourned, a delicious lunch was served. Thanks to all who brought food. Following dessert, Pastor Chris Scrivens provided a history and tour of the Church. It was very informative and hopefully will be developed into a future article for the CHS Newsletter.



## Acknowledgments - Contact Information

**CHS Trustees and Officers:** President – Edward Ng Vice President – John Pfaff Treasurer – Anita Rhodes  
Corresponding Secretary – Lois Taylor Recording Secretary- Jim Whelpley Archives – Edward Ng  
Programs – Alison Dahl Membership – Marla Jackson Historian – Ed Hanington  
**Trustees:** Meryl Carmel and Elaine Hanington **CHS Newsletter Editor:** - Edward Ng

Historical photos and maps are usually from the CHS archives including the Observer Tribune and other papers. Modern photos are by Edward Ng except as noted. Thanks to the Chester Theatre Group, Diane Butler, Penny Hoadley, Jeff Jackson, and Lauri MacMillan for their help and access to CTG archival materials and photos.

To join, please fill out the back page form. If you have stories to share, please talk to a Trustee or contact us at (908) 844-6717 or [chester.historical.society@gmail.com](mailto:chester.historical.society@gmail.com), or CHS Box 376 Chester NJ 07930. Membership information and a downloadable membership form are at <http://historicchesternj.com/home/membership.html>

## Upcoming Events – Save the Dates

Please join us on Sunday, Feb. 17, 2019, at 1 pm for “A Cabin Fever Afternoon” at The Maple Shop, 105 Main Street, Chester. We'll catch up on the history of the building, learn about DIY maple sugaring, and enjoy a performance by guitarist and raconteur Gordon Thomas Ward. Light refreshments will be served and all are welcomed to attend, free of charge. This program kicks off our year-long celebration of CHS' 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!



At 1pm on March 31, 2019, CHS and the Chester Library will host a presentation by Meryl Carmel based on her new book, Finding Kate: The Unlikely Journey of 20th Century Healthcare Advocate Kate Macy Ladd. Kate was not your usual whaling heiress! The program at the Chester Library is free of charge and light refreshments will be served.

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