



# CHESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S NEWS & VIEWS NOVEMBER 2019

Dear CHS Members and Friends, happy autumn. Our Annual Meeting on Sep. 22, 2019 at the Elizabeth D. Kay Environmental Center was a fun and exciting event. Congratulations to John Pfaff, Anita Rhodes, and Lois Taylor on election to vice president, treasurer, and corresponding secretary, respectively. This newsletter recounts Ed Hanington's presentation of the 2019 Architectural Preservation Merit Awards, the 275 year history of The Maple Shop site, and the story of the Elizabeth D. Kay Environmental Center. Finally we reprise the first year of CHS' history, recap the 2019 Annual Meeting and thank Chester Borough and Township for their proclamation recognizing our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. ♦♦♦♦♦

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## The 2019 CHS Architectural Preservation Merit Awards By Ed Hanington – Photos by Ed Ng –Chester Historical Society



Susan & Vince Desimone



Stacey Rogers



Jon & Melissa Rybkiewicz

The awardees received a CHS certificate and a 10" curved glass plaque engraved with award details.



The award to Susan and Vincent Desimone recognizes the exemplary building addition to their residence at 303 Pleasant Hill Rd. The original farmhouse was constructed circa 1800-1820 and was known as the Reger House and the Pinnacle Farm. The owners of this vernacular Greek revival house before the Desimones were Mayor Ken Caro and his wife Chris. The award is given for the addition of a sunroom on the north side and rear alterations to the roof line which do not draw away from the appearance of the original building. The house still exhibits the same view as seen from Pleasant Hill Road, but the additions provide better utilization of the house.

The next award was given to Stacey and Gail Rogers, owners of Toys with Love at 92 W. Main St. for the restoration of the L. Dickerson House and the use of a transition connector in the rear to the new structure housing retail and office space. The original structure dates from the mid 1700s with further alterations and additions over the years. The view of the building from West Main St. remains today as it looked for over 150 years.



The final award was presented to Jon and Melissa Rybkiewicz for the rehabilitation of the building at 105 Main St., and their store The Maple Shop. The use of HardiePlank for siding, the restoration of some of the 2-over windows, and siding color choices were exemplary. Buildings on this site have a long history beginning circa 1740: the first tavern in Black River, serving for 80 years, various stores for 200+ years, the US Post Office for 80 years, the Chester public library for 10 years, and the site of a robbery and the Hopler murder. More information is included in the following article. ◆◆◆◆



Hedges, Budd's, Hardin & Hedges (see map), Hedges & Burd, Cooper-Hewitt & Co., R. George & Co., Drinkwater's, Sutton's (1901), Hopler's, and Mack's (1938).

The current building is not the original tavern. In the 1880s during Chester's iron heyday, the Cooper-Hewitt mining company built the current building as a company store after moving the old tavern building to the rear of the property. The old tavern building was torn down in 1964 when the current parking lot was installed.

By 1897, the general store also housed the post office. J.M. Drinkwater had an ad which said "Full line of Dry Goods, Groceries, Millinery, Boots, Shoes, Dress Trimmings, Crockery, Provisions, etc. Your patronage solicited." (*Morris Journal*. Feb. 9, 1899)



Gilbert Hopler was a widower, father of a son and two daughters, and was a successful and popular owner of the general store since 1909. On February 26, 1938, the 60 year old, was shot twice by a .25-caliber pistol and died near the cash till. Witnesses reported two men hurried away from the store and sped off in

a car. It appears that Mr. Hopler had resisted the robbers and no money was taken from the till. Mr. Hopler had often said that a holdup would only happen "Over my dead body!" Ira French and Henry Winters, both of Hoboken, were convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment<sup>2</sup>. Mr. Hopler's daughter, Mrs. Mack, continued to operate the general store for many years.

During WWII the post office in the store was redone. In 1953, the Chester Library moved to the rear room of Mack's General Store. In 1976 the post office moved to its current location on Sentry Lane. In 1964 the library moved to the Chester Borough Hall "Quonset", at 300 Main St.



The general store became Jimmy's Army Navy in 1979 when Barry Goldman bought the location and moved his store of the same name from Morristown. It would be there for ten years then moved to Rt. 206 and Furnace Rd. (now the QuickChek). In 1998 the furniture and gourmet bistro, Once Upon A Table, followed. In September 2018 Jon and Mellissa Rybkiewicz opened The Maple Shop. In 2019, the Chester Historical Society honored The Maple Shop with an Architecture Preservation Merit Award (left) for exemplary building rehabilitation. ♦♦♦♦



Chester Historical Society  
Architecture Preservation Merit Award - 2019

Jon and Melissa Rybkiewicz

The Maple Shop - 105 Main Street

In recognition of exemplary building rehabilitation,  
preserving Chester's historic architecture

<sup>2</sup> New York Times Feb. 28, 1938 "Shopkeeper Slain in Jersey Mystery" and July 30, 1938 "Get Life Terms in Fatal Hold-up"

# **History of the Elizabeth Donnell Kay Environmental Center**

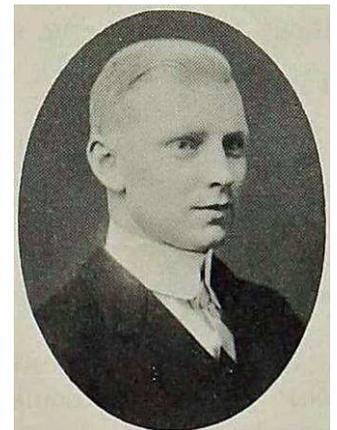
**by Edward Ng – Chester Historical Society**

Elizabeth Kay was born in Pittsburgh in 1894, the only daughter of Pittsburgh financier James Donnell and Ann Leed Warden. Her mother's father was William Gray Warden, founder of the Atlantic Richfield Refining Co., a Standard Oil trustee, and partner of John D. Rockefeller. Elizabeth attended the Master's School at Dobbs Ferry in New York and the Pennsylvania College for Women, what is now Carnegie Mellon University, the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, and Rutgers University. She took courses in sculpting and painting and studied singing under Metropolitan Opera contralto Louise Homer and music composition under Sidney Homer. During WWI she studied nursing.

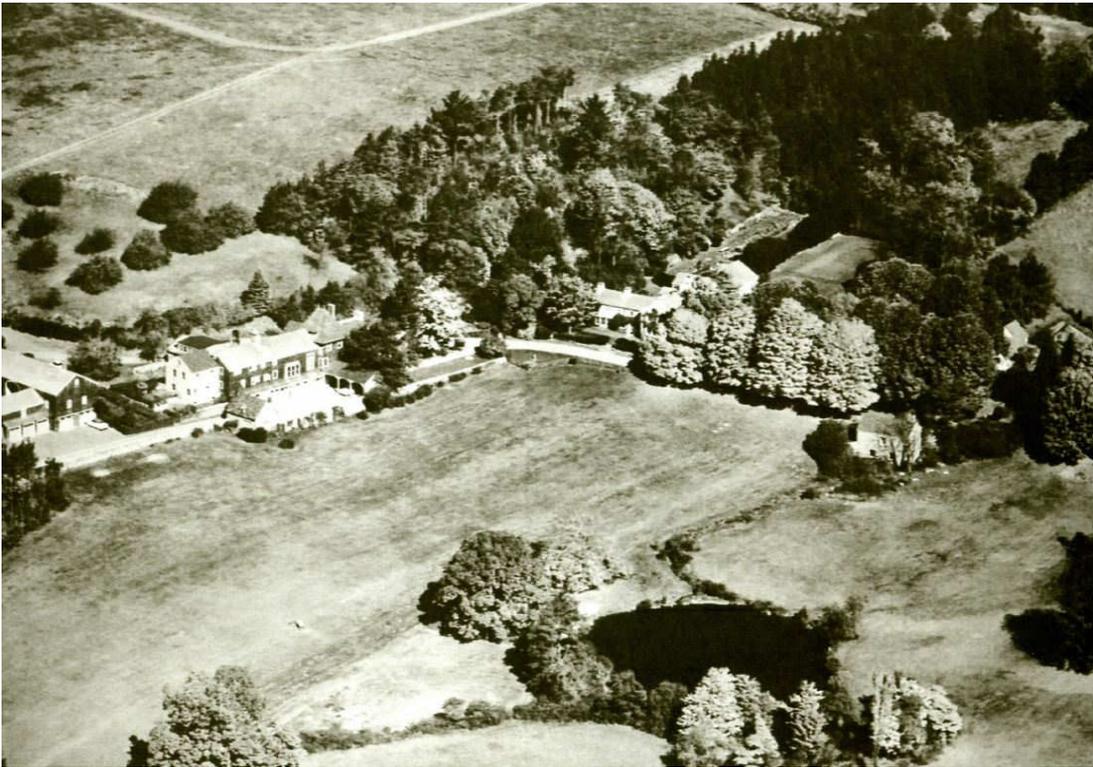


According to her daughter, Elizabeth frequently visited her grandfather's house, "Warden's Castle" in St. Augustine FL. It was built in 1887 in the Moorish Revival style and though her grandfather died in 1895, it remained in the family until 1930. It was later converted to a Ripley's Believe It or Not Museum. You will see later this was a very important connection in her life. Her mother died when she was 13 and her father died in 1918 when she was 22 years old. She married Alfred Goddard Kay in 1915.

Her husband Alfred Goddard Kay (1899-1973), the son of Fredric and Jana O'Hara Kay, was also born in Pittsburgh. He was a prominent student at Princeton University from 1906-1912. He was head editor of the *Horae*, treasurer of the Missionary Society and a member of the *Concordian*. Mr. Kay was also an accomplished athlete. He was part of the Princeton football team (1907), golf team (1906-7), and captain of the "Tigers" hockey team (1908-1912). His Princeton portrait is to the right. After his graduation in 1913, he joined the Pittsburgh Trust Company, but left after three years to join the New York Stock Exchange with stockbrokers firm Childs, Kay and Woods, later Kay and Richards & Co.



It seems that Alfred's college days at Princeton and his Wall Street career brought them to New Jersey. Elizabeth and Alfred bought land in Chester in 1924, including a late 18<sup>th</sup> century stone farmhouse that they converted into a comfortable country estate. They lived in Chester during the spring, summer and fall on their 233 acre estate named Hidden River Farm. The property encompassed an array of habitats, including fields, deciduous forests and a hemlock gorge set along the Black River. The couple wintered in Palm Beach, Florida. They adopted two daughters, Audry and Anita, and a son Warren.



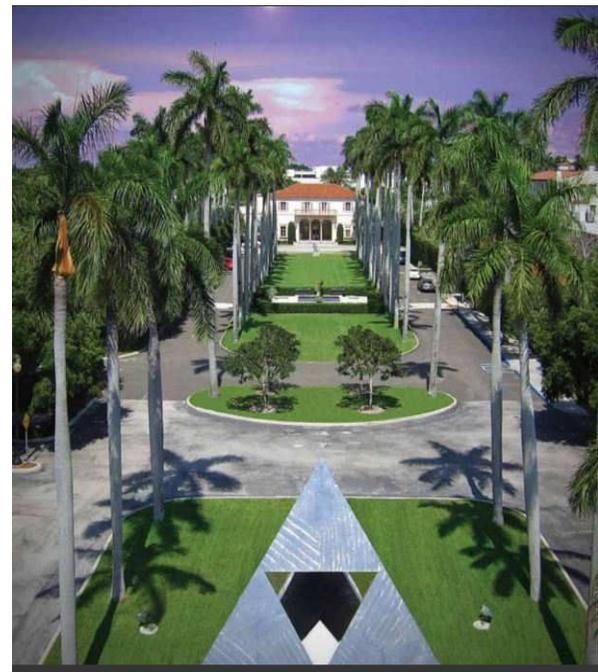
The adjacent aerial photo<sup>3</sup> shows the main residence at Hidden River Farm to the right of center. "Halfway House", "Hallscroft" and "Faraway House" are to the left of center. Also in the early 1920's the Kays purchased a house in Palm Beach called Audita<sup>4</sup> with 150 ft. of ocean frontage.

According to her daughter Audrey, Elizabeth had a great interest in flora and fauna from early childhood. In the mid 1930s she helped establish an experimental arboretum testing hundreds of tropical trees and flowering shrubs. That experimental arboretum grew into what is now the impressive Four Arts Botanical Gardens south of Palm Beach (recent image right).



David Fairchild photo by Klara Farkas 1949

Her mentor was Dr. David Fairchild, mycologist, entomologist, plant pathologist, geneticist, and plant explorer extraordinaire. The Kays were lifelong friends and wrote an award winning biography of Dr. Fairchild. He played a key role in Elizabeth's next project.



<sup>3</sup> Aerial image and young Elizabeth from John K. Turpin and W. Barry Thompson New Jersey Country Houses *The Somerset Hills Vol. 2*

<sup>4</sup> Audita has 4 bedrooms and 5 ½ baths and is a mile from Mar-a-Lago. In 2018 recent owners sold Audita for \$18.5 million.

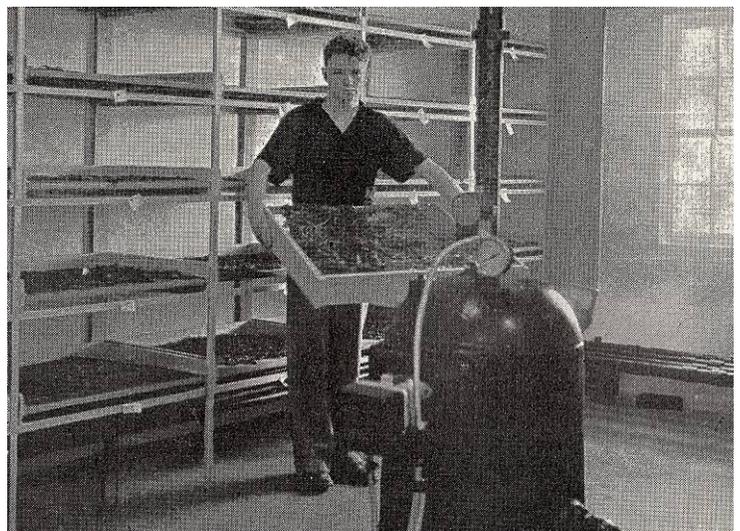
In the 1930s and early '40s, Elizabeth Kay was a food star -- not quite a Martha Stewart, but she was a "foodie" in her own time, extolled on radio and print for her Herb Farm enterprise on State Park Road. As a keen horticulturist, she became obsessed with a corner of her garden where herbs were not growing very well. A well-timed visit by her friend, Dr. Fairchild, led them to develop ways to grow, dry, preserve, mix, and prepare herbs for culinary use. Also about that time, a derelict "4 square" barn with 3-foot thick stone walls, and two Girl Scout leaders with cooking talent in need of work, came to her attention serendipitously. The barn was refurbished, the Scout leaders hired, and the Herb Farm Tea Room was launched (outside view left, inside Tea Room right).



Elizabeth and her team dried, blended and powdered combinations of herbs for culinary use in a manner any cook would understand and not be afraid to use. The quality of the herbs and Tea Room offerings were spread first by word of mouth by patrons at the Tea Room (sometimes more than 400 a day), then on radio by Mary Margaret McBride, the "First Lady of Radio", and in Duncan Hines' *Adventures in Good Eating at Home* newspaper column. To the surprise of the Chester Post Office, Herb Farm herb orders came in and herbs went out to locations all over the USA.



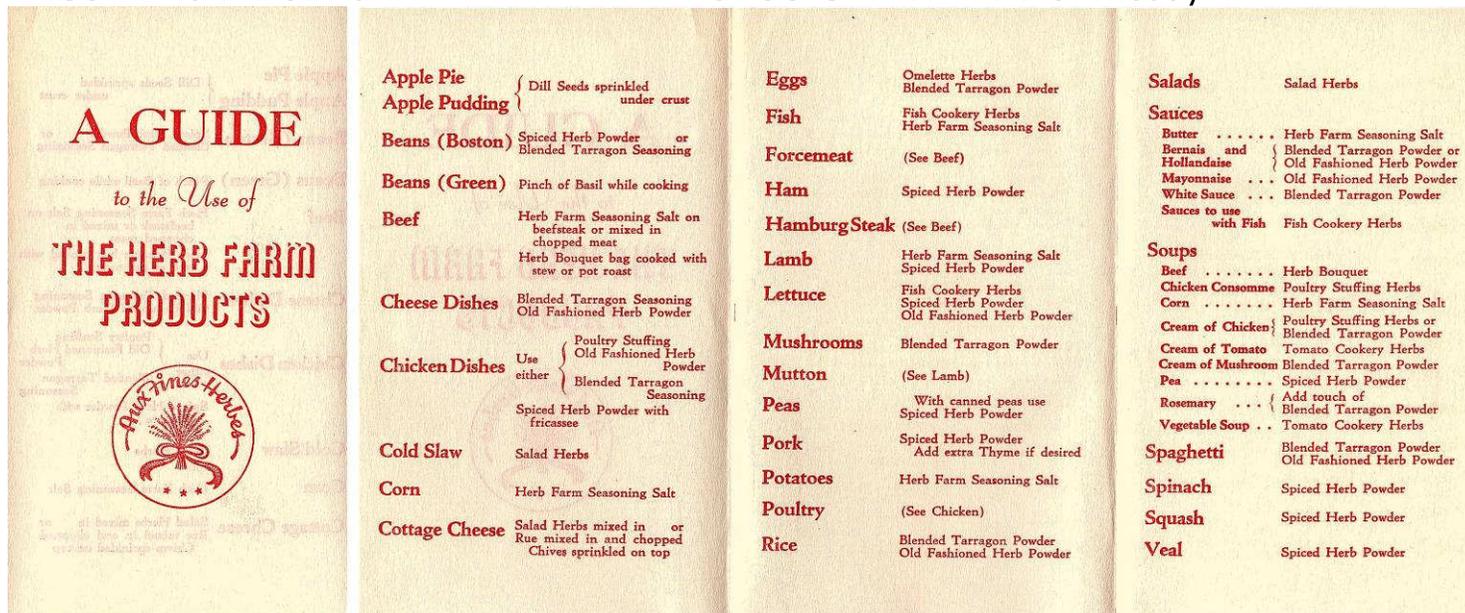
The blending room



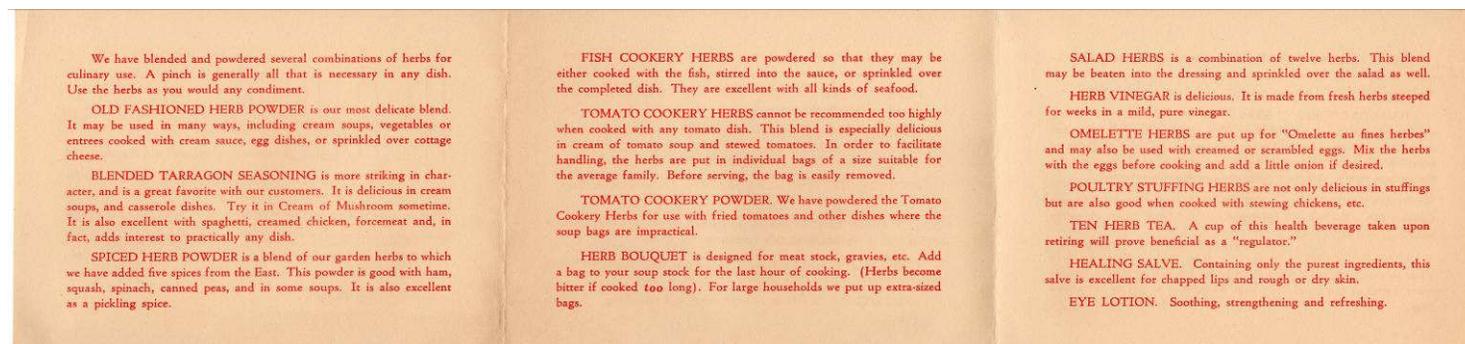
The herb drying room

To help cooks overcome their fear of using herbs, Elizabeth published two handy guides that were given away to visitors.

"A GUIDE to the Use of THE HERB FARM PRODUCTS" is still relevant today.



The HERBS brochure provided cooking tips with herbs.



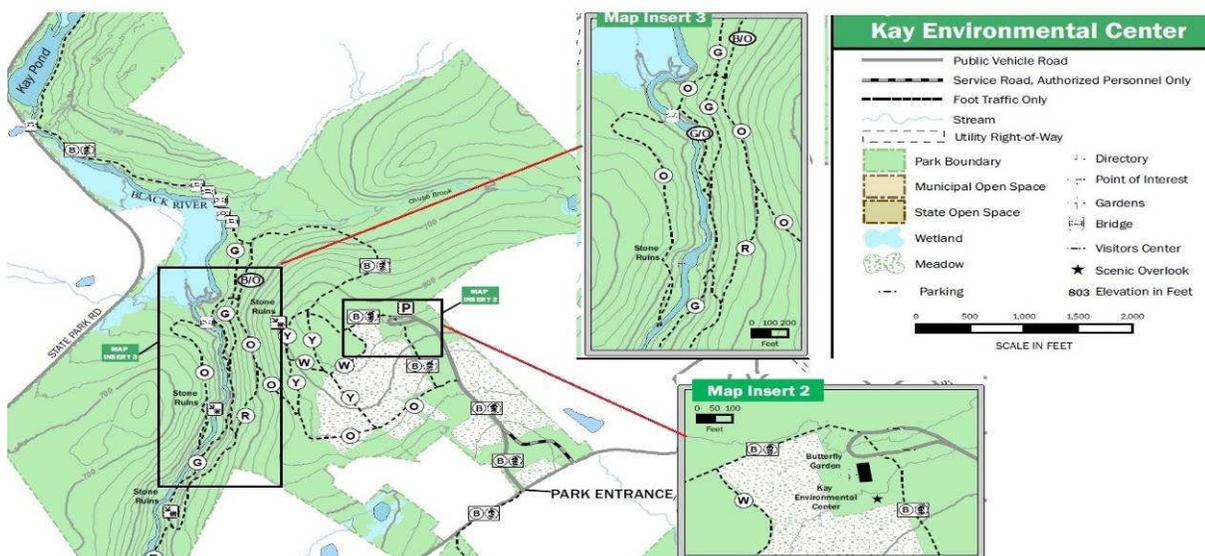
All good things come to an end and WWII closed the Herb Farm. Alfred was called away to Washington DC to be Deputy Director of the U.S. Office of Censorship. Elizabeth put her nurse's training to good use and headed up the nurses' aides at Sibley Hospital in DC.

By the mid-1950s, the Kays were empty nesters. Their children were in their thirties and had moved out. Like any American couple, they decided to downsize. By 1956, they had picked out another location, with higher elevation, for a smaller house and started the design process. They were trading their 9-bedroom 9-bath house for a 7-bedroom 6½-bath house so it wasn't much downsizing. The Kay's "modest" house is now the New

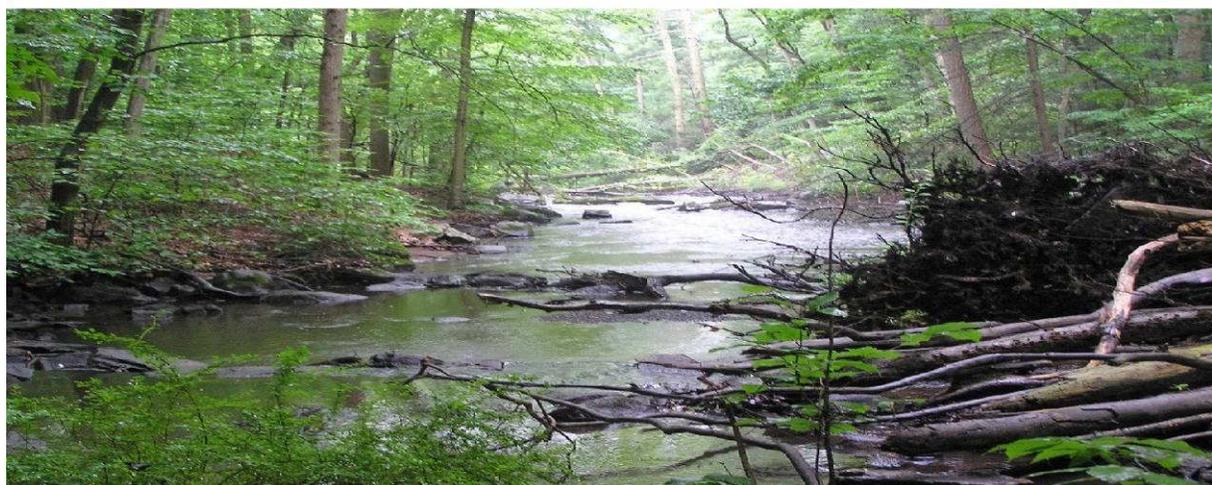
Jersey field office of The Nature Conservancy (and the locale of the 2019 CHS Annual Meeting; see image page 12). The Kays moved into this house in 1959. A 30+acre parcel including the main Hidden River Farm house and buildings was originally slated to be the Warren School for Boys, but was eventually sold to William Garland for a school for boys.

Elizabeth's passions were not limited to herbs. She brought the same level of energy and creativity to her philanthropic endeavors, The Seeing Eye, the Garden Club, and the Girl Scouts. The Kays were particularly passionate conservationists. They established two environmental centers. In 1960, they donated 150 acres of land to help establish the Pine Jog Environmental Education Center in Palm Beach County, FL. The center hosts over 25,000 students and 750 teachers annually. Starting in 1962, the Kays began donating parts of their 230-acre Hidden River Farm to the Morris County Parks Commission to be used as an environmental center, where "each day would bring a new wonder and challenge to learn." The Elizabeth D. Kay Environmental Center in Chester was dedicated on October 28, 1993 for "the teaching of children and adults in the natural sciences and the appreciation thereof." ♦♦♦♦

## Elizabeth D. Kay Environmental Center



**Kay Virtual (above map) and Kay Reality (beauty below)**



**The Black River near the Red Trail**



#### Elizabeth and Alfred Kay Philanthropy

- Co-founded Palm Beach Day School in 1922
- Co-founder of St. Mary's Hospital
- Fund raised, led, and supervised the building of the library of the Four Arts Society
- Leaders in the rescue of Pine Ridge the only hospital serving the black community in West Palm Beach
- Helped merge St. Mary's Hospital and Pine Ridge Hospital
- Wrote the biography of Dr. David Fairchild, "The World Was My Garden" and "The Plant World in Florida" based on the work of Dr. Henry Nehrling.
- Donated 120 acres and created the Pine Jog Environmental Sciences Center, later renamed the Pine Jog Environmental Education Center in Florida

#### Alfred Kay Philanthropy

- Chairman of the Board of the Palm Beach Civic Association for 17 years
- Vestryman of the Church of Bethesda By the Sea
- Board member and officer of the Everglades Club for 50 years

#### Elizabeth Kay Philanthropy and Awards

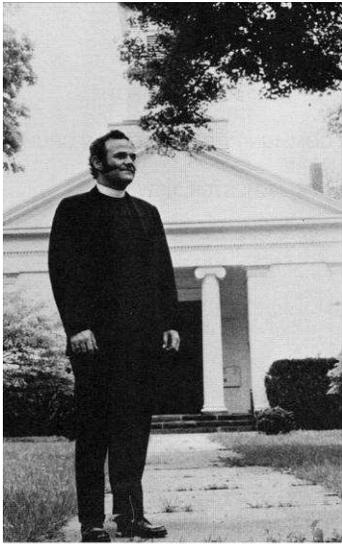
- President of the Garden Club of Palm Beach
- Officer and Editor of the Garden Club of America magazine
- A founder of the Visiting Nurse Association of Palm Beach County
- A founder of the Seeing Eye Center in Morristown, NJ
- Donated buildings and 230 acres of property to the Morris County Parks Commission to create the Elizabeth D. Kay Environmental Center
- 1976 Awarded an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Humane Letters from Florida Atlantic University
- 1976 Awarded Conservation Educator of the Year by the National & Florida Wildlife Federations.

#### Elizabeth and Alfred Kay Awards

- 1965 Both awarded the Thomas Barbour Medal by the Fairchild Tropical Garden in Miami
- 1968 Both awarded a Bronze Medal by the Garden Club of America



## **Chester Historical Society- 1969 the First Year**

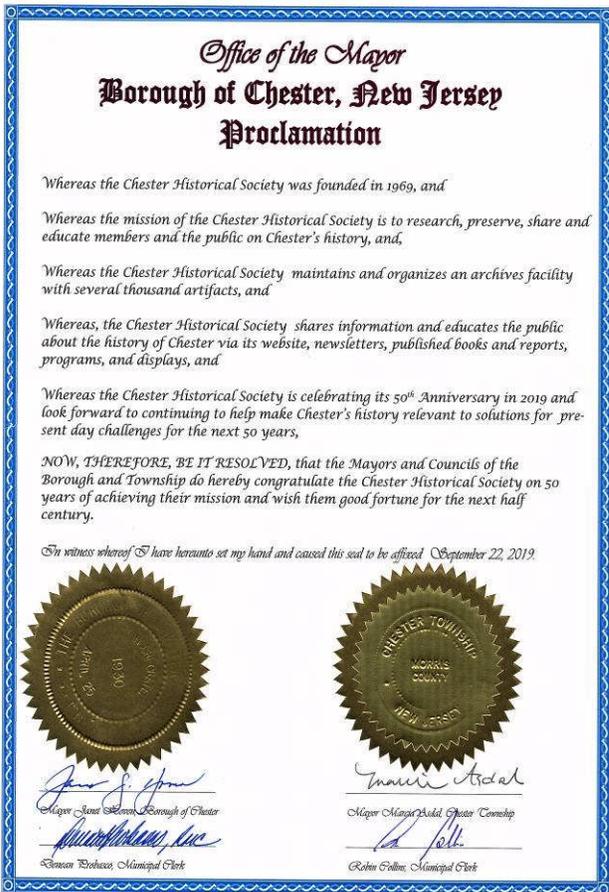


**Rev. Robert S. Maseroni**

Nancy Collins recorded: "The first meeting of the proposed Chester Historical Society was held on February 5, 1969, at the Presbyterian manse, Main Street, Chester. The following people were in attendance: Verna Allen, Nancy Collins, Bentley Crane, Bob Maseroni—who called the meeting, Georg Nas, Hank Rozenbroek, Len Taylor and Elaine Shoup."<sup>5</sup> They discussed how best to preserve and share interests in the history of the Chester area.

"These efforts came to fruition on April 11, 1969 when the organizational meeting was held. At this meeting, attended by some one-hundred people, the Chester Historical Society was formally founded by fifty-seven Charter Members."<sup>6</sup> The constitution and by-laws were adopted. Hank Rozenbroek, Rev. Bob Maseroni, Len Taylor, and Nancy Collins were elected president, vice-president, treasurer, and secretary, respectively. Frances Greenidge was the guest speaker.

The first Annual Dinner was held on October 29, 1969 at Larison Turkey Farm Inn, Chester NJ. Gene Miller, an authority on the "true Americans" was the guest speaker and his topic was "Lore of the American Indian". ♦♦♦♦♦



## **Thanks to Mayors Hoven and Asdal For Honoring CHS' 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

**Whereas the Chester Historical Society was founded in 1969, and**

**Whereas the mission of the Chester Historical Society is to research, preserve, share and educate members and the public on Chester's history, and**

**Whereas the Chester Historical Society maintains and organizes an archives facility with several thousand artifacts, and**

**Whereas, the Chester Historical Society shares information and educates the public about the history of Chester via its website, newsletters, published books and reports, programs, and displays, and**

**Whereas the Chester Historical Society is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2019 and looks forward to continuing to make Chester's history relevant to solutions for present day challenges for the next 50 years,**

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Mayors and Councils of the Borough and Township do hereby congratulate the Chester Historical Society on 50 years of achieving their mission and wish them good fortune in the next half century.**

<sup>5</sup> Chester Historical Society Archives February 5, 1969 organizing meeting minutes.

<sup>6</sup> Chester Historical Society Annual Report 1969.

## Recap of the CHS Annual Meeting – September 22, 2019



Elizabeth D. Kay Environmental Center



Ed Hanington presented the Architectural Awards



Lunch was enjoyed inside.....or outside, with a toast to our 50th



**Left:** Marla Jackson's delicious 50<sup>th</sup> carrot cake disappeared quickly.  
**Center:** Debbie Tintle's centerpiece was lovely.  
**Right:** Welcoming Sign

Thanks to Anita Rhodes and Marla Jackson for organizing the venue and food. Thanks to all who brought tasty appetizers and side dishes. ♦♦♦♦

### Acknowledgments and Contact Information

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

Historical photos and maps are usually from the CHS archives. Modern photos are by Ed Ng except as noted. Thanks to Melanie Bump, Morris County Parks Commission, for images and help in researching Elizabeth Kay.

If you would like to join CHS or if you have stories or pictures to share, please talk to a Board member 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 available at <http://historicchesternj.com/home/membership.html>.

Web: [historicchesternj.com](http://historicchesternj.com) email: [chester.historical.society@gmail.com](mailto:chester.historical.society@gmail.com) phone: (908)866-6717 PO Box 376 Chester NJ 07930