



# CHESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S NEWS & VIEWS NOVEMBER 2020

## Table of Contents

<b>Blasts from the past! Recognize these 1976 Chester ads? .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chester's 150-Year Old "Rockefeller Center" .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Martha Brookes Hutcheson - Chester's Women's Suffrage Activist .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Larry Lowenthal – 1940-2020 .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Chester Covid-19 Update.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Acknowledgments and Contact Information.....</b>	<b>14</b>

## **Hello CHS Members and Friends, I hope you had a safe (and tasty) Thanksgiving.**

It is hard to believe we are 11/12ths of the way through 2020. What a year it has been! The pandemic and the elections have been shadows that followed us everywhere. However, it is also a year to look back and not see shadows, but bright spots (☀) from the past:

CHS held a no-hassle election. Edward Ng was re-elected as president (Thank you!). Meryl Carmel, Alison Dahl, Ed Hanington, Elaine Hanington, and Marla Jackson were re-elected as Trustees. Congratulations! ☀ We are celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> birthday of Chester's Rockefeller Center by documenting its fascinating history and starting a new preservation effort. ☀ We celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment which established the Constitutional right for women to vote. In 2020 over 81 million women voted in the national election. In local history, Alison Dahl writes about Martha Brookes Hutcheson's efforts to support women's suffrage. ☀ Another bright spot is the celebration of the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of Chester Borough. CHS will honor the occasion by publishing a new version of the booklet, *A Stroll Through The Old Village of Chester, N.J.*, in 2021. The booklet was first published in 1976 by CHS. The first printing sold out and the second had these ads:

## **Blasts from the past! Recognize the ads? ☀**

<p>31  <b>CRAFTTIQUE OF CHESTER</b> HOME DECORATING SUPPLIES DRIED FLOWERS – STRAW WREATHS RIBBON – CORN HUSK DOLLS MINIATURES – CANDLES AND MORE Tues.-Sun. - 10:30 - 4:30 Budd Avenue 879-7272</p>	<p><b>Ads from A Stroll Through the Old Village of Chester, N.J. 1976 2nd Edition</b> <b>Congratulations to Boehs Cabinet Shop on Your Longevity!!</b></p>	<p>51  <b>Flowers of Chester</b> "FLOWERS FOR EVERY OCCASION" FRESH &amp; DRIED FLOWERS, PLANTS GIFTS, CANDY &amp; TERRARIUMS Over 500 types of dried material 879-8350 879-6445 87 EAST MAIN STREET CHESTER, N. J. 07930</p>
<p>34  <b>Needlecrafts</b> COMPLETE CENTER FOR ART NEEDLEWORK Monday thru Saturday 10 - 5 Sunday 1 - 5 78 Main Street 879-7992 LARGEST SELECTION IN NEW JERSEY</p>		<p>38  <b>Bread Board COUNTRY STORE</b> "EVERYTHING YOU WANT AND MORE" GRANDMA'S COUNTRY CURTAINS – PRIMITIVE ANTIQUES – COMPLETE YOUR COUNTRY DECOR 879-7188 150 East Main Tues. - Sun. 10 - 4</p>
<p>35  <b>Woodcocks Gourmet</b> "A LIBRARY OF THE WORLDS FINEST FOODS" — International Cheeses &amp; Delicacies — Timberdoodles Nest For Cookware Tues. - Sun. 10 - 6 68 E. Main Street 879-8366</p>	<p>38  <b>Antiques</b> 50  <b>Boehs Cabinet Shop</b> WOODEN GIFT ITEMS UNPAINTED FURNITURE SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE OPEN DAILY 879-7261</p>	<p><b>The Teacher's</b> FOR ANIMAL LOVERS ONLY A FOREST OF WILDLIFE RECREATIONS ALSO FINE ACCESSORIES FOR YOUR PET COME SEE - ENJOY OPEN DAILY 879-7227 Hop &amp; Skip Up 206 "Worth The Hop"</p>

# Chester's 150-Year Old "Rockefeller Center"

## People – Places – Purpose

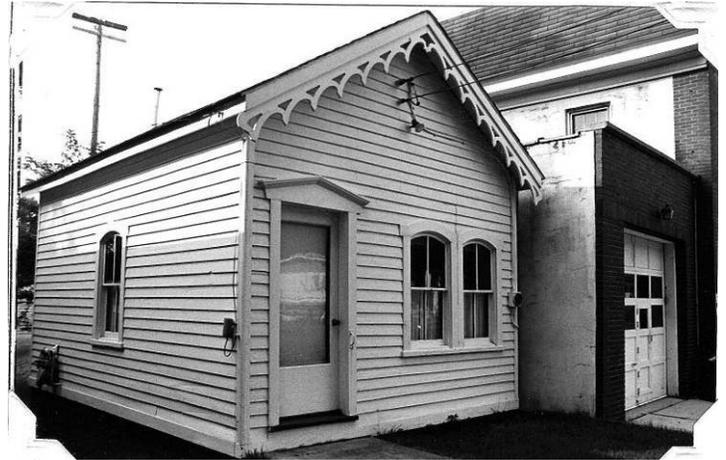
By Edward Ng – Chester Historical Society

The origin of the name is explained later in the article. Please don't confuse Chester's to the one in NYC!

Chester's "Rockefeller Center" packs more history per square foot than any other building in the historic village. In part that is due to its diminutive size, only 280 square feet, but also due to its location in the center of Chester, its longevity, and the people who used it.

The Morris County Historical Sites Survey for Chester Borough (1985/1986) provides background information. The structure was built between 1868 and 1887. It was then located next to the building at 92 Main Street. The Survey description reads:

*Small commercial building in the Carpenter Gothic style. 1-story, gable roof, gable-end façade accented by decorative scalloped bargeboard. Naïve pediment (Greek Revival influence?) marks doorway, door replaced. Paired 2/2 windows with elliptically arched heads, eared moulding. Clapboard siding, rubblestone foundation. Condition: Good*



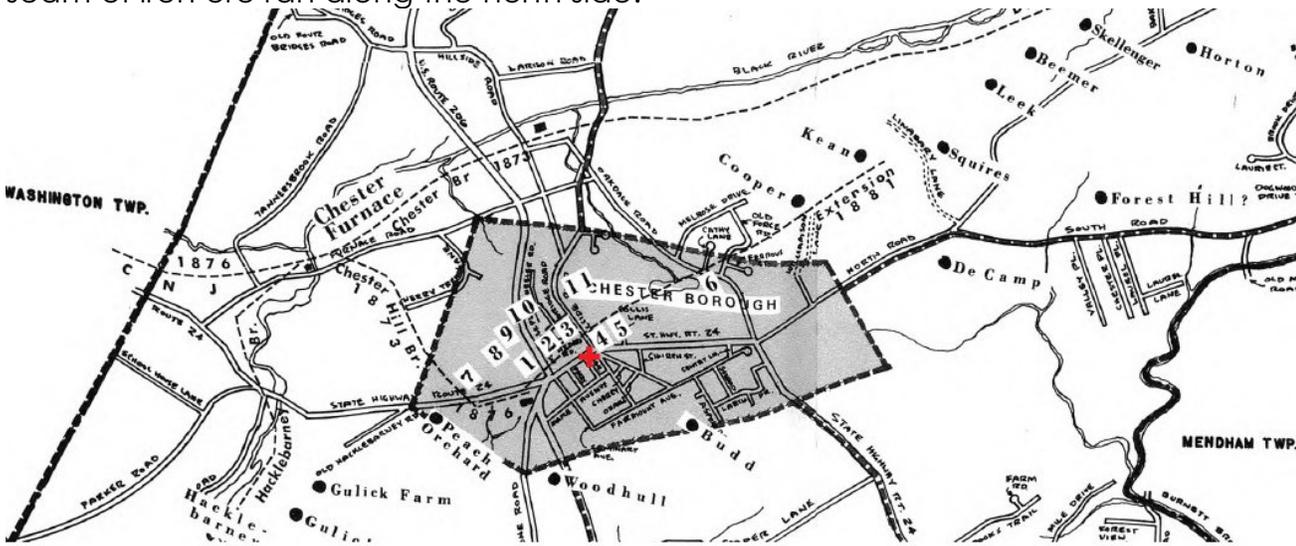
The Survey picture (right) was taken in August 1984 when Rockefeller Center was next to the firehouse.

The 1868 date is important. If Rockefeller Center were built in 1868, it was at the beginning of Chester's iron boom. Author Larry Lowenthal eloquently describes the economic and social maelstrom occurring in Chester at that time. He wrote in his book, *Chester's Iron Heyday* published by the Chester Historical Society in 1980:

*In the long view of Chester history, the Iron Age was an astonishingly brief period, really just an episode. Unlike the older mining centers in Morris County—Mount Hope, Hibernia, Mine Hill—which went through an extended evolution with many fluctuations before final extinction, Chester compressed the entire cycle into little more than a generation. The result was a frenzied excitement such as the older districts had never experienced, and a sudden emptiness when it was over. In the early phases Chester had a real boom-town atmosphere, and the prevailing mentality recalled the great gold and silver rushes of the 19th Century, although the analogy should not be exaggerated—no wagon trains of prospectors were seen coming over the Washington Turnpike.*

*This Iron Age was Chester's Golden Age, a vibrant time of growth and development, with effects on every aspect of life. It was also the period when Chester's most conspicuous and colorful personalities flourished. True, the iron era left few permanent traces—even the mines are becoming increasingly difficult to find—and, as with any romantic episode, the letdown at the end was painful. Yet anyone who understands that it is better to have loved and lost than never loved at all, will not begrudge Chester its fleeting iron heyday.*

The story goes (Frances Greenidge's *Chester New Jersey – A Scrapbook of History*, page 79) that in 1867, T. Perry Skellenger was digging an icehouse in the rear of his property at 35 Main Street. He uncovered a black rock that he recognized as iron ore. Soon his mine and a large number of other mines sprang up all over Chester, especially along Main St. where the seam of iron ore ran along the north side.

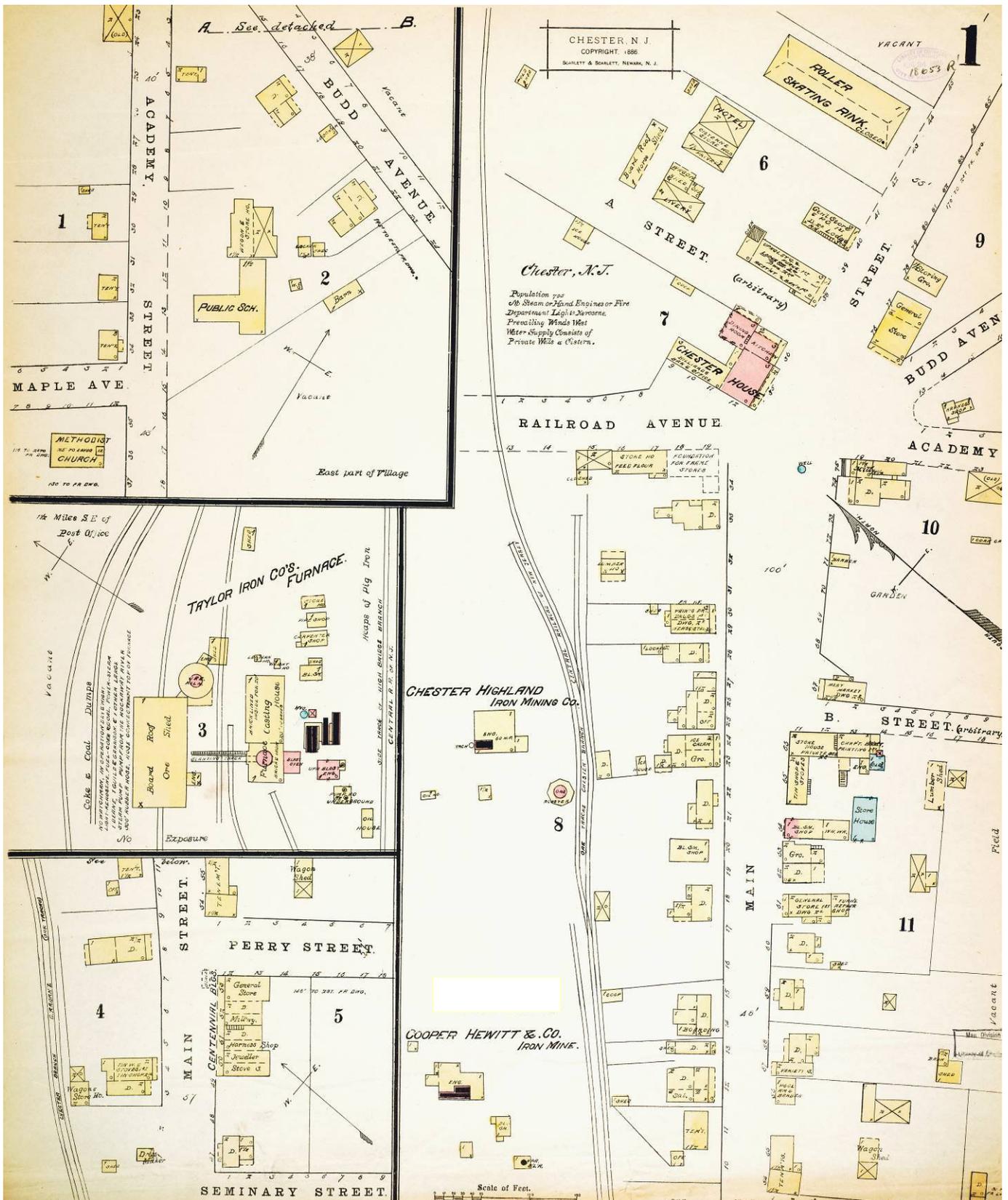


**Portion of Map of Iron Mines from *Chester's Iron Heyday* by Larry Lowenthal (1980)**  
**Mines in what is now Chester Borough:**  
**1-Samson 2-Skellenger 3-Cromwell 4-Hotel 5-Collis Farm 6-Swayze 7-Hedges**  
**8-Dickerson Farm 9-Topping 10-Hedges Farm Exploration 11-Cramer**  
**+ approximate location of building from ~1876 to 1996**

As can be seen on the above map, there were at least a dozen mines in what is now Chester Borough, and many more indicated by the dots in the Township. One of the many buildings that went up during the iron boom was this small structure that came to be known as Rockefeller Center. The population of Chester increased from about 1600 in 1867 to over 2300 by 1880. The mines attracted mostly men as shown in this image of miners and workers at Taylor's Chester Furnace.



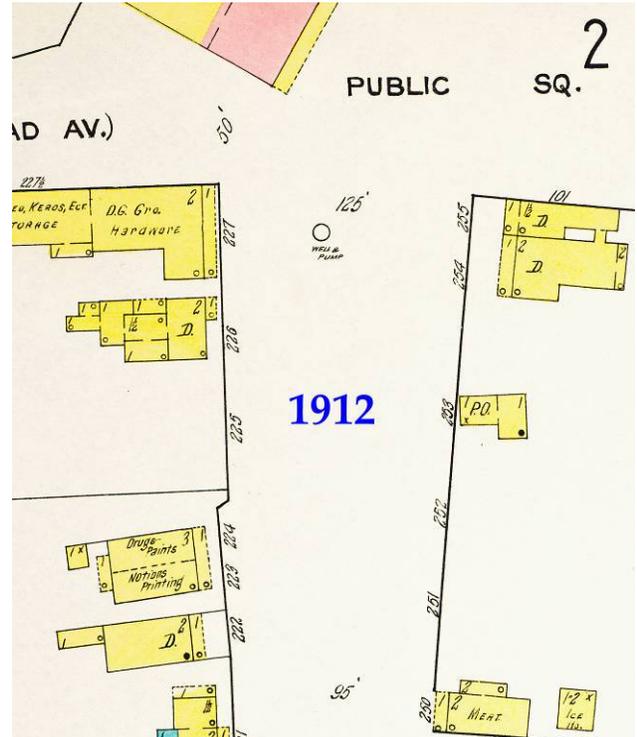
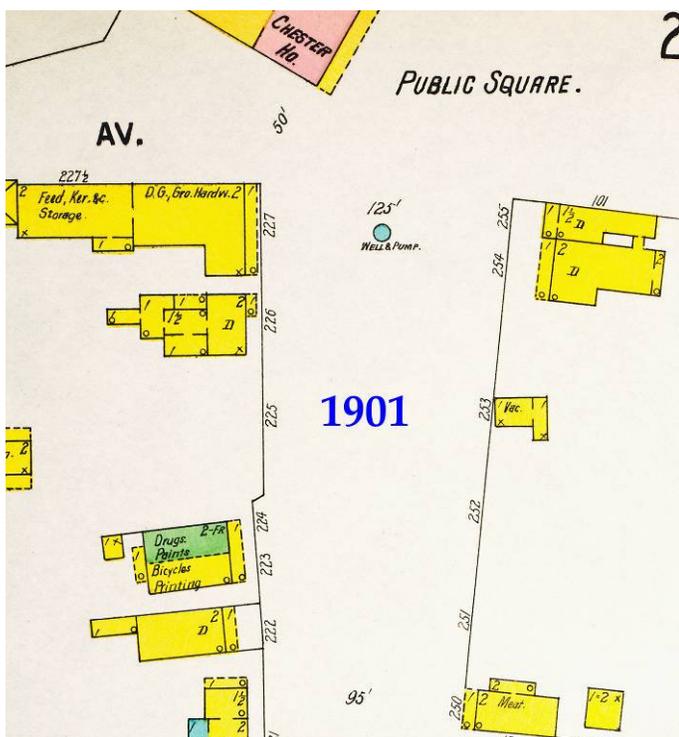
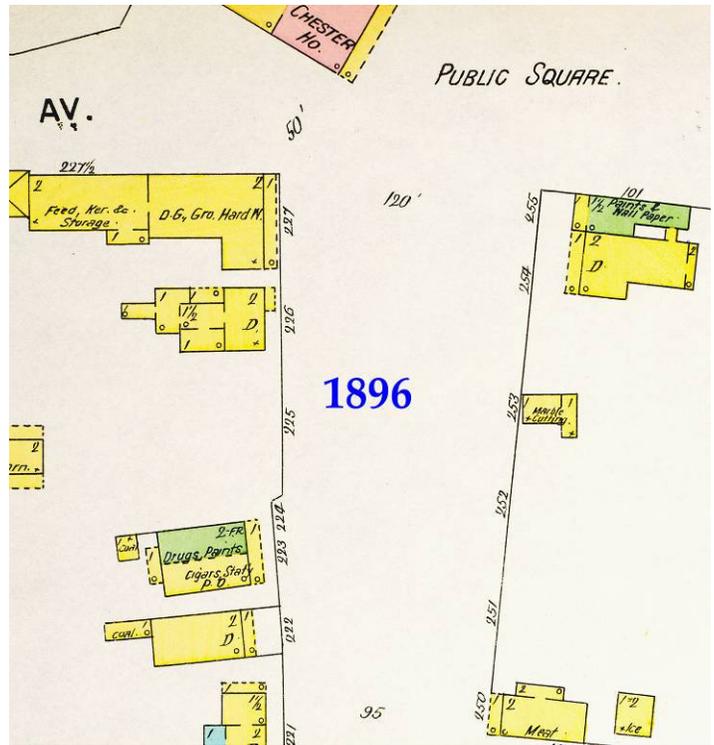
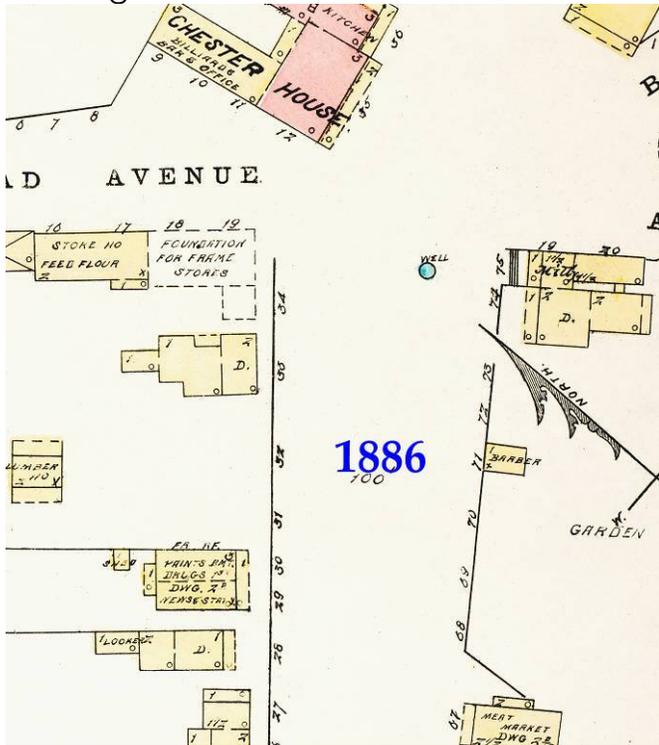
Some of the most useful sources for researching Chester's history are the Sanborn Insurance Maps. Sanborn Maps were used for risk assessment and provide a wide range of information: streets, location of buildings, building materials, fire hazards, wells, building use, schools, churches, and much more. The fascinating 1886 Sanborn Map is a snapshot of Chester at the peak of the iron boom. It shows not only the buildings along the western portion of Main Street (right side of map), but is the only map we know of that shows Taylor's Iron Company's Furnace (currently the Chester Furnace Historic Site). The Chester House is now the Publick House and the pink-colored symbol indicates it is made of brick. The maps give us information about the use of Rockefeller Center through the years.

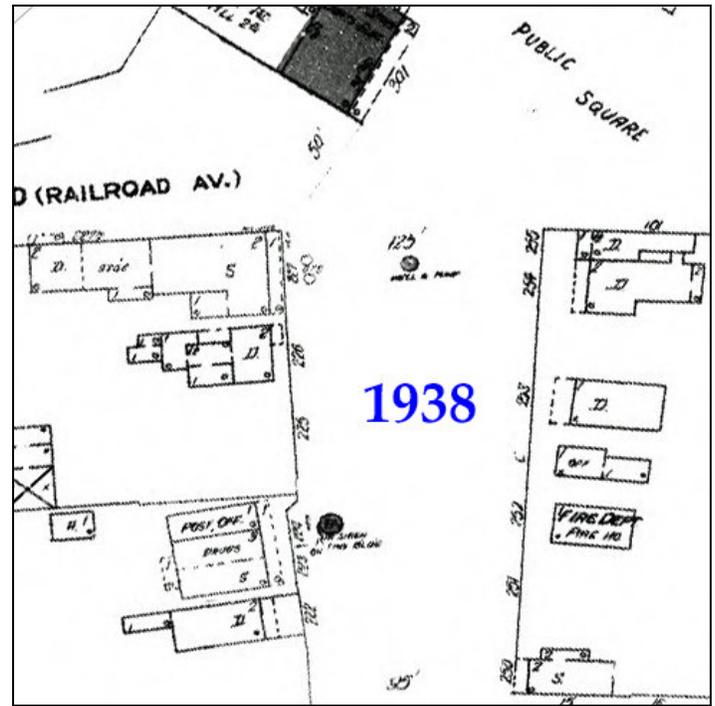
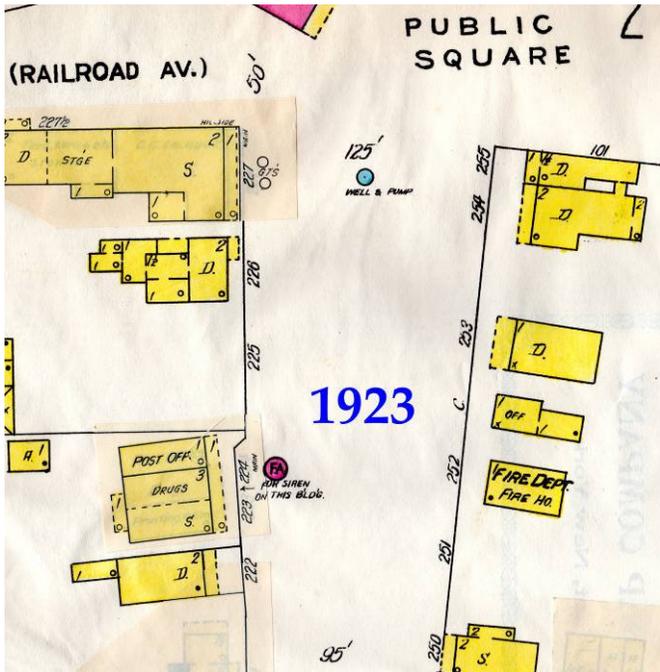


Displayed on Pages 5 and 6 are extracts of the 1886, 1896, 1901, 1912, 1923, and 1938 Sanborn maps, focusing on the area where Rockefeller Center was located. The original location of Rockefeller Center is shown on the map above. It is shown just below the large north-pointing arrow between Academy Street (now Grove Street) and B St. (now Warren

St.) on the right side of Main St. A magnified view of that location on the 1886 Sanborn Map shows it was a wood building (yellow-colored symbol) and labeled as a BARBER shop (below left). It makes sense that a barber would do a brisk business during the iron boom when there were lots of men with money.

The 1896 map shows the building (to the right of the year in blue) labeled "Marble & Cutting". In 1901, following the iron boom bust, it is labeled "VAC" – vacant. In 1912 the building is shown as "PO" - Post Office. In 1923 and 1938 it is labeled "OFF" – office.





In the 1923 map, the Post Office operation moved across Main St. and the "Fire Dept." – firehouse was built on the west side of Rockefeller Center. A "D" – dwelling was built on the east side. The new firehouse was a 20' x 30' wooden building and not surprisingly had "Fire HO." – fire hoses. Records show that a brick firehouse was built to replace the wooden one and was completed in 1940.

**CHESTER MARBLE WORKS.**

**J. S. HILDEBRANT,**

MANUFACTURER OF

**Monuments, Tombstones, &c.**

MADE TO ORDER IN EVERY STYLE.

I hereby undersigned begs leave to announce to the public that he is now prepared to manufacture and will keep constantly on hand the latest designs of

**MONUMENTS,**

**TOMBSTONES, MANTLES, &c.**

Cemetery plots enclosed of Granite and Marble Posts. Every job warranted to give complete satisfaction. Prices moderate.

**J. S. HILDEBRANT,**

OPPOSITE CHESTER HOUSE,

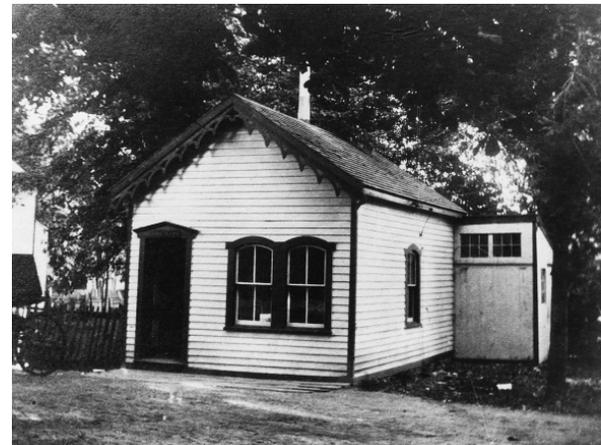
10-1y CHESTER, N. J.

Iron Era 1875 03 13

The names of the tenants of the building are not precisely known, but the Sanborn Maps and other records provide information. After being a barber shop, the building became a "marble and cutting yard" according to the Sanborn Maps. An ad in the Dover-based newspaper *Iron Era*, dated March 13, 1875, was for the Chester Marble Works, "opposite the Chester House". Mantles, monuments, and tombstones were made and "Every job warranted to give complete satisfaction. Prices moderate". Author Frances Greenidge reported that W.J. Litzenberger was another marble yard owner and by 1897 "he was doing a good business". Greenidge recounts that John Croot, longtime Chester resident, recalled seeing "headstones in the back room". A monument and tombstone business

was conveniently located since the cemetery near the First Congregational Church was only a tenth of a mile away and the cemetery on Pleasant Hill Rd. was less than 2 miles away.

On the 1886 Sanborn Map, the building is rectangular in shape. On the 1896 Sanborn Map the building became L-



shaped by an addition to the rear of the structure. The image on the previous page, from 1906 when it was the Post Office, shows part of the addition on the right of the building. The 1923 and 1938 Sanborn Maps show the side building was moved to the rear, recreating a rectangle.

After the marble cutting business closed, the building served as the Chester Post Office from about 1905 to 1920. Just as Chester evolved, becoming less mining and farming-based, the purpose of the little building evolved. Robert Crammer, in a 1996 letter to the Chester Historical Society wrote about growing up in Chester and recalled, "Abe Meyer was quite a figure in Chester. He had his office in the Rockefeller Center, was always dressed well and drove new big cars. His cattle business was successful...Until the railroad was discontinued in Muskrat, the cattle would be brought in there by cattle car...We drove them as a herd from the station to the farm on North Road near the Crossroads [Lowensteiner's then, Stony Hill Farms in 2020]. Our family lived on that farm". As noted by Larry Lowenthal in his book, *Iron Mine Railroads of Northern New Jersey*, page 24, Muskrat was the station in Chester on the DL&W railroad that ceased operating in 1934. Bernie's Hillside Tavern (125 Hillside Rd.) is the remaining evidence of the railroad station complex nowadays.

The next part of the history involves two families with many connections to Chester: the Conover family and the Rockefeller family. Where they intersect provides an explanation for the name "Rockefeller Center" and much about life in Chester in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The story jumps around, so pay attention!

The Rockefeller families were active in Chester's history and social life. Arthur C. Rockefeller (1878-1948) formed the A.C. Rockefeller Family Orchestra (with wife, four sons and two daughters) that performed in Chester in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The image below, from the 1930's, shows the Orchestra with their instruments.



**Seated L->R: Joe (drums) Dorothy (piano) Elizabeth (guitar) Della (mandolin)  
Standing L->R Arthur Jr. (trumpet) Arthur Sr. (violin) Charles (sax) George (banjo)**

John Philhower Rockefeller (1864-1954), a cousin of Arthur C. Rockefeller, ran the Milltown Store and made deliveries from 1900 to 1913 when the store burned down. The Old Mill Tavern (55 State Rte. 24) sits on the site of the old store. John P. Rockefeller was the father of several Chester notables: the "Rockefeller Twins" Mabel Hoffman and Mae Conklin, and sons Walter A. and John Carlos. Greenidge notes that Walter Rockefeller & Bro. advertised "Bicycles" in the Chester Drama Club program in 1910 – bicycles were important to their business for a long time. Andrew J. Rockefeller, John P. Rockefeller's brother, ran several hotels in town including the Depot House (in 2020 Bernie's Hillside), and the Chester House (in 2020 the Publick House at 111 Main St.).

John P. Rockefeller's son, John Carlos Rockefeller (1898-1980), was born and grew up in Chester. According to his obituary in the Observer Tribune (Nov. 20, 1980), he was known as "Rocky" to Borough residents. Though standing only 5'8" and weighing only 165 pounds, he more than lived up to that name. He fought on the front lines in France in WWI. After 22 days at the front, he wrote a harrowing letter to his friend in Chester, Herbert Conover, dated Nov. 7, 1918, from "somewhere in France" that reads in part:

*Dear Herb ...I will try to tell you a little about the front...I am walking on a road or path about 500 yards behind the front line. I hear...cannon fire from the German side. Then I hear the shells whistling through the air. I try for some cover, and believe me it doesn't take long to find it...a shell hole...dugout...or a rolling kitchen...I go headlong into a shell hole, the shells may hit close and half cover me with dirt and probably some stones will strike me in the back...I have 300 yards to go. I have to cross an open space of about 100 feet where the enemy can see me...I get about half way across and their snipers open fire on me, one will pass by my head, the next will strike by my feet...I fall flat on my stomach...and after about five minutes I crawl very slowly on my knees and elbows until I get to some cover...which is full of gas...I put on my gas mask and get through it. There I go up a trench to my post. The top of the trench is covered by German machine guns so that if I stick my head up I would get a bullet in it. My comrades say, "Did you have any trouble getting in?" I say, "No, just watch yourself, that's all." This happens every day at the front so I guess you know war is hell.*

Rocky Rockefeller returned from battle safely in 1918 as a corporal in the army. In 1944, he married Gertrude (Gert) Lillian Dean (1916-1980). In Chester in the 1950s, if you needed help you always turned to Rocky or Gert – you had no choice! Rocky was the *only* policeman and Gert was the *only* first aid and fire department dispatcher (and the police matron as well). Rocky's nephew, Henry Hoffman, recalled Rocky "used his own car and since there were no radios at the time, if you wanted him you had to go looking for him" (Daily Record Nov. 14, 1980).



**John Carlos "Rocky" Rockefeller**  
(Daily Record 11-14-80)

Greenidge writes about Gert's service to Chester from 1955 to 1969:

*The (First Aid) Squad and the Fire Company, indeed the entire community, owe a great debt of gratitude to "Gert" (Dean) Rockefeller who lived at 92 East Main Street, practically next door to the firehouse. For fourteen years she answered telephone calls for emergency aid on a twenty-four hour a day basis, "directing aid where needed, and standing by the telephone and the two-way radio (in contact with each fire truck) as long as needed." She would call in other fire companies, and "alert the Ladies' Auxiliary to serve coffee at the scene and at the firehouse on the men's return. In case of an*

accident she would, if asked, notify the family doctor or phone a hospital to have a doctor standing by," and countless other things.

In addition to their jobs as sole policeman and dispatcher for many years, from 1955 to 1969 Rocky and Gert ran a tiny shop in the building between their home (which was known as "Conover Cottage" at 92 Main St. – more on that in a minute) and the firehouse. Together, they ran a greeting card and bicycle repair shop in the little building next door -- which came to be known as "Rockefeller Center". I believe the name is a tongue-in-cheek reference to its small size and lineage, and/or an ironic reference to the iconic buildings in New York City. It was certainly a way to honor Rocky and Gert's service to Chester.

George E. Conover (1867-1942) was a Chester businessman and entrepreneur. Along with Alonzo "Lon" Green, they established the first telephone company in Chester. He and Lon shared the building at 87 Main St. Lon ran a drug store and George ran his shops on the west end of the building.

Started initially as a paint store, *The Iron Era* reported that it subsequently expanded to "Printing, Stationery and General Merchandise, Clocks, Watches and jewelry, silverware, Bicycles, Sport Goods, Kitchen furnishing goods, confectionary, cigars and tobacco" . . . which he sells "at reasonable prices, satisfied with a

small profit on each article". His most notable retail innovation was to start "Conover's Cash and Carry". As noted by Greenidge (page 136): *In 1919 he introduced to Chester what he called "a new way of shopping - cash and carry, with no monthly bills to pay."* In order to get his message to the people, he began a three-year publication of a monthly news sheet entitled *Conover Cash Store News*. In it he told his story of thrifty buying, ran a Chester history column (written by his son Herbert T. Conover), put jokes and riddles here and there, and "Household Hints," and "Items of Interest" (local news), and advertisements of his bargains. At the top of each issue it proclaimed "SPEND ALL YOUR MONEY AT HOME" and "IT PAYS TO PAY CASH".

Herbert, George Conover's son who wrote the history column in *Conover's Cash Store News*, was the "Herb" with whom Rocky Rockefeller corresponded in WWI. Years later Herb would become Rocky and Gert's landlord for Conover Cottage and Rockefeller Center.

Back to George, one of the most important items he printed was postcards, many with scenes in and around Chester. The image of Rockefeller Center in 1906 when it was the Post Office is taken from one of his cards.

SPEND YOUR MONEY AT HOME	<b>CONOVER'S CASH STORE NEWS</b> GEO. E. CONOVER, Proprietor	IT PAYS TO PAY CASH
Vol. III, No. I	CHESTER, NEW JERSEY, DECEMBER 1920	PHONE 28-M
<b>ANYONE WILL TELL YOU</b>		
<p><b>THE STORY OF CHESTER</b> <i>Continued</i></p> <p>At the present time there are living in Chester numerous descendants of the earliest settlers, and of these the Cooper family probably dates back the farthest.</p> <p>This family of which General Nathan A. was a member descended from Sir Astley Cooper, the celebrated surgeon of England. Some of the family in 1700 settled on Long Island, whence Nathan Cooper came to Roxilicus, which then com-</p>		<p><b>THE BEST PLACE TO BUY XMAS GIFTS</b></p> <p>That are both desirable and useful is at the Conover Cash Store—the store that saves you money.</p> <p>Once again the happiest and most welcome of all our holidays draws near. With the compliments of the season to all our readers, we ask you the question of the hour—WHAT ABOUT CHRISTMAS? The children are asking about it.</p>

In 1923, George E. Conover and his wife, Hattie, purchased property from Albert and Mabel Driver. The property extended from 98 Main St. (the corner of Main St. and Grove St.) to the firehouse and included Rockefeller Center. As one can see from the 1923 Sanborn Map on Page 6, a new building appeared to the east of Rockefeller Center. It is described in the 1999 edition of *A Stroll Through the Old Village of Chester, N.J.*: "Formerly a Sears Roebuck 'pre-fab' Californian bungalow known as Conover Cottage". George and Hattie passed away in the 1940's and their son Herbert T. Conover and his wife, Viola, took possession of the property. The image from circa 1945 shows, right to left, the firehouse, Rockefeller Center, and Conover Cottage.

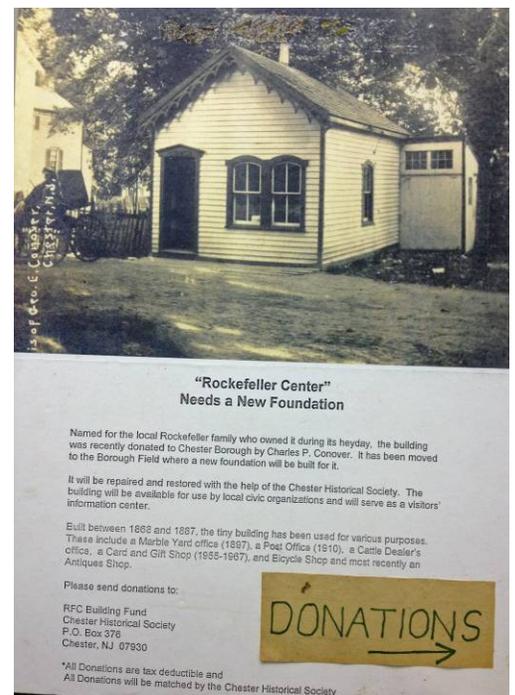


Herbert passed away in 1980 and Viola passed away in 1982 after which the property transferred to their nephew, Charles P. Conover, better known as "Pete". In 1996, wanting to expand Conover Cottage and further develop the adjoining property, Pete Conover needed to move Rockefeller Center. I digress a bit again:

A few years after the Rockefellers retired, occupancy of Rockefeller Center shifted to Steffi Terry. Starting in 1983 and for the next 13 years, she owned and ran the Painted Pony Antiques Shop. Steffi influenced Pete to donate the building to the Chester Historical Society and in 1996 Pete offered Rockefeller Center to the Society. However, since the Society did not own any land, it could not accept it. So, it was agreed that Chester Borough would take ownership of Rockefeller Center and would provide a permanent space in the southwest corner of Municipal Field, close to the building at 137 Main St. (Country Café in 1996). The Chester Historical Society would provide funds to pay for a foundation, repairs, and other improvements.

Rockefeller Center was moved across the street in the spring of 1996 and stood on blocks at its new site until money could be raised for a foundation and improvements.

A yearlong fundraising campaign was launched. One of the donation posters is shown to the right, using an image from George Conover's postcard of the Post Office in 1906.



Starting in 1996, a subcommittee of the Chester Historical Society worked very hard to make repairs and preserve Rockefeller Center. Information from the subcommittee chairman Jim Woodruff (CHS Newsletter Jun-July 2002) and a letter from Treasurer Anita Rhodes, addressed to the Mayor and Council dated Feb. 23, 2015, provided the timeline of repairs and costs borne by the Chester Historical Society:

- 1996-1997 -- Foundation and drainage installed
- 1997 -- Exterior painted by Eagle Scout candidate Michael Whelpley and fellow Scouts
- Chester Garden Club installed a cottage garden and continues to maintain it
- 2000-2001 -- Pole, 200 amp service, heating, and outlets installed
- 2002 -- Rotten wood replaced, attic vent and new gutters installed
- Center support was constructed in crawl space to reinforce floors
- CHS members painted interior walls after spackling and sanding
- 2003 -- Roof was replaced

The Chester Historical Society spent a total of \$16,000 (\$24,000 in 2020 dollars) from 1996 to 2003. Additionally, hundreds of hours were contributed by Chester Historical Society volunteers and thousands of dollars worth of professional pro bono work were donated.

Rockefeller Center is now 150 years old. It is showing its age. After getting Tender Loving Care in the early 2000s, it needs a second round of Tender Loving Care to get the building in shape for another 150 years. Chester Borough, which owns the building, and the Chester Historical Society whose mission is "To Research, Preserve, Educate, and Share Chester's History", can work together to create a win-win-win-win (community, Borough Administration, CHS, future generations) strategy. The next step is to create a preservation plan. This document intended to inform and catalyze the creation of a preservation plan. With the plan and subsequent preservation work, we hope to bring Chester's Rockefeller Center back to life – for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. ☀



**Chester Borough's Rockefeller Center (in Nov. 2020) located in the southwest corner of Municipal Field. To the west is Fresco Mexican Restaurant, Fresco Boutique, and Bodyheart Therapy Center (137 Main St.) and to the east is the Gazebo.**

## **Martha Brookes Hutcheson - Chester's Women's Suffrage Activist**

**Alison Dahl – Chester Historical Society**

Martha Brookes Hutcheson (nee Brown, 1871-1959) was perhaps the most influential woman in Chester to champion women's rights and social reforms during the Progressive Era (1890s-1920s). She came of age when widespread social activism intensified to combat the ills of industrialization, urbanization, immigration and political corruption--not unlike modern times.

Educated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, she was one of the first women trained in the emerging profession of landscape architecture. Much of her writings and speeches encouraged women to support and implement environmentally sustainable design. Interestingly, she railed against typical domestic lawns and plantings, calling them "appalling".

This was also during the period when Theodore Roosevelt split the Republican Party, forming his Progressive Party in 1912 to advance a social-reform agenda, placing women's rights and social justice at the forefront of national politics -- American women had not been given the right to vote.

During World War I (1914-1918), she became one of the seven founders of the Women's Land Army (WLA) which "aimed to protect the national food supply and help to provision US allies by educating and employing women as farmers<sup>1</sup>." When women took up work in hospitals, factories, offices and farms, gaining new authority and earning power -- Martha Brookes Hutcheson was on the vanguard. The WLA combined three powerful women's organizations, each contributing its particular skills and influences: the suffragist movement, with its activism; the Garden Clubs of America (GCA), which brought social influence; and the Women's National Farm and Garden Association...formed in 1914 to train women for careers in horticulture and agriculture<sup>2</sup>."

Hutcheson found great success establishing a group of WLA "Farmerettes" at her home, Merchiston Farm, now known as Bamboo Brook Outdoor Education Center, a Morris County Park System site in Chester Township. The WLA employed more than 15,000 women in 40 states, including the crew at Merchiston Farm, which was one of 32 WLA units in New Jersey. "Thus became the landscape of the women's



M.B. Hutcheson -  
seated center  
Image from Morris  
County Parks  
Commission

<sup>1</sup> Roxi Thoren, "Dreaming True" *Places Journal*, November 2018

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

war economy<sup>3</sup>." In the summer growing seasons of 1917 and 1918, corn production at Merchiston Farm more than doubled. Wheat and oat production grew by 50% and gross receipts "more than doubled in 1917 and tripled in 1918."<sup>4</sup>

Many of Hutcheson's gardening principles are evident today -- prioritizing the use of native plants to support healthy natural habitats, fostering sustainable water management, and furthering the then-emerging science of ecology to promote balance between man and nature -- or more clearly, between women and nature.

More details of Hutcheson's accomplishments and the beginning of her interest in social reform through garden design were featured in an article in the June 2019 issue of the *CHS News and Views*. ☀

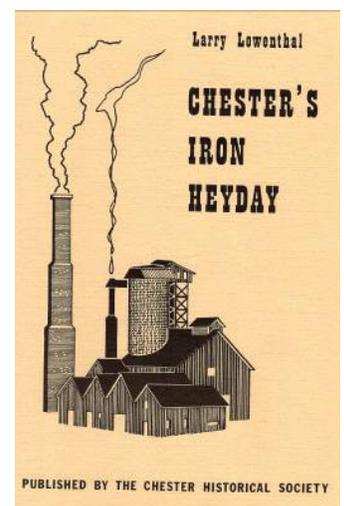
## **Larry Lowenthal – 1940-2020** **Edward Ng – Chester Historical Society**

Larry Lowenthal was enchanted by Chester at an early age. At a talk about "The History of Chester's Railroads" in 2013, he described his first impressions when he came to Chester from Ironia to play a ball game at the fields in the middle of Chester in 1952:

*When I first saw Chester village in those years, I was astonished. It made a really strong impression, because it was like walking into a...something un-worldly about it. It was like walking into a different dimension. It was like walking through a curtain and coming into a different dimension of time. And it must have been a really powerful impression, because there I was, maybe 12 years old, not the most sensitive person in the world, and yet this feeling was really noticeable that I was walking back into the past.*

The mystery and love of history would be themes for the rest of his life. He graduated from Rutgers and then earned a Master of Arts in History at Yale. His first job was working as a historian for the National Park Service. He would be an NPS historian for 30 years. Chester would cross his path again in his research on the iron mines and railroads in the 1970's. Larry was a hard working, astute, and meticulous researcher. He spent hundreds of hours reading over 60 years worth of newspapers from that era. Often times his wife Kitty and his kids would be in the library with him as he did his research.

In 1980 he authored, *Chester's Iron Heyday* which was published by CHS. His eloquence and passion for history is evident in the paragraphs from his book, quoted on page 2 of this newsletter. Forty years later, it still has no equal. Writing somewhat autobiographically, he wrote in the preface "... it is my hope that some Chester boy will be inspired to roam the woods and railroad beds of Chester, immerse himself in another time, and add to our knowledge of Chester's Iron Heyday." I hope any girl or boy would be lucky enough to follow in Larry's footsteps and immerse themselves in Chester's history.



<sup>3</sup> Elaine F. Weiss, *Fruits of Victory: The Women's Land Army of America in the Great War* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press/Potomac Books, 2008) 107.

<sup>4</sup> Roxi Thoren, "Dreaming True" *Places Journal*, November 2018



Larry Lowenthal - CHS Program 5/11/2013  
----- "History of Chester Railroads" -----

Larry wrote another book, *Iron Mine Railroads of Northern New Jersey* published by the Tristate Railway Historical Society in 1981. Quite a bit of the book concerned Chester and in 2013 Larry returned to Chester to give a talk on "The History of Chester Railroads". The Chester Historical Society videotaped Larry's talk and it is available on Chester Historical Society's YouTube channel. Part 1 is at <https://youtu.be/HHev-3TqNk> and Part 2 is at [https://youtu.be/6TvwLUku\\_G0](https://youtu.be/6TvwLUku_G0). Never satisfied with "history", Larry speculated on three mysteries in his talk: 1) Fact or fiction, the 1867 dating of Perry Skellenger's iron ore discovery? 2) Why was the Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western train station inconveniently a mile north of the center of Chester? 3) How did the three rail lines at the Chester Furnace operate when they were at three different levels? See the video. Please let us know if you solve the mysteries or have explanations to help us understand Larry's conjectures. The video links are also available at [www.historicchesternj.com](http://www.historicchesternj.com).

Larry passed away quietly on March 13, 2020 at his home in Brimfield, MA. Chester lost an author, a historian, and a friend. In my copy of *Iron Mine Railroads of Northern New Jersey* he wrote: "*To Ed - Keep enjoying History*". I will try. We should all keep enjoying history. ☀

### Chester Covid-19 Update

As of November 24, 2020, since March, there have been 23 cases in the Borough, 104 in the Township, and 12,606 infections in Morris County. The latest death numbers, from October, tragically show that 4 people have died in the Borough and 4 in the Township. The rate of infection has increased significantly. In the last 10 day period the infection rate in the Borough was 0.6 infections/day up from 0.1 in the previous 10 day period. In the last 10 day period, the Township infection rate was 1.5 infections/day, up from 0.5 in the previous 10 day period. As a sign for Halloween Trick or Treaters advises: "**Please: Wear a Mask – Keep 6' APART**". ☀



### Acknowledgments and Contact Information

**CHS Trustees and Officers:** President – Ed Ng Vice President – John Pfaff Treasurer – Anita Rhodes Corresponding Secretary – Lois Taylor Programs – Meryl Carmel Archives – Edward Ng Membership – Alison Dahl Additional Trustees: Ed Hanington, Elaine Hanington and Marla Jackson Recording Secretary - **vacant** If you are interested in becoming a Trustee, please contact CHS.

**CHS Newsletter Editor:** Ed Ng Grateful thanks to Sandy Jacobson and Alison Dahl for editing help.

Historical photos and maps are usually from the CHS archives except as noted. Modern photos are by Ed Ng except as noted. Other sources of information were Ancestry.com and Morris County Clerk's office databases.

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>.