

The Chester Historical Society's



NEWS Winter 2013 & VIEWS

About Historic Downtowns.....

Shakers and movers take very literal steps off the well beaten paths of suburban design and zoning prisons to focus on the "end users" experience. In other words, the move towards "contemporization" of the community has no stock with the real shakers and movers who prefer the satisfaction of the human experience over the ever present greed of the predictable developments.

Today, in this age when electronics are out-

moded before you can pay the credit card bill, and this age of dumbed down disposable architecture that gives us even less interesting stores, the old downtown offers a welcome respite.

It remains just as firmly planted as our national monuments and those old license plates in the drawer.

Old downtowns offer unexpected buildings in unexpected places. Where else but in an old downtown can you find a Latin restaurant sharing space with a monument company or a tea shop doubling as an antique store? Where else can you find handwritten signs that say, "watch your head on the stairs" or "caution, loose floorboards"?

There is a novelty and sense of adventure in historic downtowns. Stores have room after room of collections of eccentric merchandise around every corner. You are compelled to linger longer, moving from a cheerily dark tavern to a bright and gay ice cream adventure without getting near your car. There are surprises and bargains and never-heard-of items. There are crazy building arrange-



Left: Downtown Chester Decor Right: Historic Barn in a Chester Office Parking Lot

ments at funny angles and in unexpected places. Narrow walkways are secret little worlds of their own as well as short cuts. Gift buying can actually energize your senses and become fun again. Best of all, there is a sense of human scale and an inviting "come hither" emotion that certainly is more satisfying than "please let me find it and get out of here."

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Design and Production by Amanda J. Dean

Photos by Ed Ng

And so it is with the “Larison Corner”. It deserves a creative solution worthy of “Anthropology Today.” This site has been successful as an inviting human experience for a couple of hundred years, and the only cause for future failure would be an owner who does not understand that truth.

By Leonard J. Taylor

*Chester Township Historian
Contributing material by John Watts.*

Letter from the President

By Ed Ng

Dear CHS Members and Friends,

This Fall and Winter has been a busy one for the Chester Historic Society. Of course we will never forget Super Storm Sandy, but there were many other fun and constructive activities. The Fall began with our annual picnic. We lucked out and had a gorgeous Sunday at Willowood Arboretum. In addition to a fine luncheon and fun socializing in the historic stone barn, we did conduct business.

I was elected President and Elaine Hanington was re-elected as Recording Secretary. Alison Dahl received a hardy round of applause, a bouquet, and many thanks for her hard work as the outgoing President and organizer of the picnic.

Ed Hanington, acting on behalf of CHS, presented Dennis and Freda Zakar the Architectural Award for rehabilitating the exterior of their house at 44 Hillside Road. It is a historic house originally built in 1873 by Deacon Cramer. Many thanks to those who brought food, helped, and attended our annual summer get together.

The October program brought back the popular author and speaker, Gordon Ward who had previously entertained and enlightened us with programs on his journey recreating parts of the Lewis and Clark expedition and his investigations into local paranormal activity.

In that Thursday evening’s program, Gordon entertained us with his anecdotes, poetry, songs, photos, and guitar accompaniment. His musical talents were much appreciated. His touching program helped

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Historic Downtowns cont.

The colorful randomness of buildings, walks, weathervanes and rooftops can be a huge boost to the human spirit that has been worn down by the numbing similarity of chain stores and shopping centers.

Old downtowns are not safe and predictable. The eccentricities are often frustrating. “Closed” at an odd hour without reason or “please shut the door behind you” or “don’t let the cat out” or rest rooms that could be almost anywhere in the building. Imagine your sense of awe at being able to move from one experience to another by foot and not having to hew to the anxiety of finding yet another awkward parking space for your car.

President's Letter cont.

link the past with the future in a way that informs and inspires. It was a heartfelt expression of why our personal, home, and community histories work together to foster self understanding and harmony.

The much anticipated Furnace Walking Tour led by Len Taylor was postponed by the untimely arrival of Super Storm Sandy. The Tour will be rescheduled for this spring. The aftermath of Sandy forced the postponement of Larry Lowenthal's program, *The History of Chester's Railroads*, sponsored by the Chester Library and CHS. Larry is author of *Iron Mine Railroads of Northern New Jersey* and *Chester's Iron Heyday*. His talk has been rescheduled for Saturday May 11 at 10 AM at the Chester Library. Please plan to attend and bring your questions about a defining and intriguing period of Chester history.

Fortunately weather was not a factor



Top Left: Lovely day at Willowwod Arboretum and the stone barn for the CHS picnic.

Bottom Left: Ed Hanington (left) presents the Zakars with the Architectural Award.

Bottom Right: The multi-talented Gordon Ward provided musical accompaniment to his hometown story and history.

Top Right: Members enjoy lunch in a spacious, comfortable room inside the stone barn.

for the December CHS Holiday Party at the historic Bernie's Hillside. Originally the Depot House, the hotel for the nearby railroad station, then the Anthracite Hotel, and now Bernie's. It is a cozy, convenient, and very appropriate locale for our party. It is also quite the hotspot for popular music in Chester. Thanks to the help of Amanda and Marc Dean we had musicians Gary Dillon, Jake Stigers, and Bill Kelly entertain us with a variety of music, from rock and roll to pop, country-western, and even a carol or two. CHS members were joined by Mayor Bill Cogger and Mayor Bob Davis, but no politicking was allowed. I would like to thank Alison Dahl for her hard work, her organizational skills, and to all who contributed food and labor. Good food, good libations, good music and good cheer made for a great party. (see images on page 4)

Later in December, CHS members participated

in the Larison's Turkey Corner Visioning Project. The invitation read "The Borough is seeking public input on future land uses and development of the Larison's Corner Turkey Farm property." CHS members attended both of the public meetings in early December to express their opinions. The CHS Board also posted a letter to the Borough describing the historical priorities for the site. You can read that letter in this newsletter.

The CHS Board encourages all interested parties to express their opinions. You can do so by going online at www.chestervisioning.org, navigate to

the bottom of the page and click on Discussion, again navigate to the bottom of the page and fill out the Comment form. At Borough Council meetings on the first and third Tuesday evenings in February, The results of the public input will be summarized and a draft vision statement will be presented.

All interested parties are invited to attend and to comment on the summary and the draft vision statement. CHS will keep its members updated on the presentation, but attendance at the Council meetings would show our concern for the future of Larison's corner.

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President's Letter cont.

One of the major goals of CHS in 2013 is to make significant progress in organizing our archives. A key part of that effort is to train volunteers to help in the inventory process. Under the guidance of Debra Schiff, the Chester Library Local History Librarian, we conducted an archives workshop attended by 7 volunteers. We learned how to handle, add, and inventory artifacts in our collection. The plan is to have teams of 3 or 4 volunteers work together for an afternoon or morning each week. We would love to have more volunteers, please call CHS at 908 866-6717 or email chester.historical.society@gmail.com.

Great lunch, fun music, and lots of conversation inside Bernie's.



The CHS Holiday party was held at the historic Bernie's Hillside, previously the Depot House and the Anthracite Hotel.

Gary Dillon, Jake Stigers, and Bill Kelly played everything from rock to carols. Very enjoyable music.



mine are historic sites located on the 24 acres of Larison's corner. Even if we were not bound by the CHS Constitution¹ to advocate for historical preservation, we would be advocating for preservation and historically consistent repurposing, because of the symbolic importance of the locale for Chester.

The Turkey Farm locale makes an important statement about Chester's sense of place which we would summarize as "Historic with a country feel and family friendly". The history of the locale reinforces that vision. Isaac Corwin first built a farmhouse on the high ground in 1800. James Topping, a successful cabinet maker, built Sunnyside as a nearby residence for his young widowed daughter in-law in 1873. An important mine situated on Larison's corner was the Sampson mine which operated until 1885.² In the mid 20th Century, the ninth generation of the Larison family in Chester, started Larison's Turkey Farm Inn. Until the end of the 20th century, a day and a dinner at the Turkey Farm Inn was the way many families highlighted their visit to Chester.

The Board of the Chester Historical Society's vision for the site is not "Larison's Turkey Farm Inn – For a real family dinner"³ *per se*, but our vision contains the comple-

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Visioning for Larisons

Project Input from CHS Board

The Chester Historical Society Board would like to thank the Governing Body of Chester Borough for sponsoring the Larison's Turkey Farm Visioning Project and for inviting all stakeholders to express their vision for the future of the Larison's Turkey Farm corner.

The CHS Board strongly urges the Governing Body to do all they can to preserve the historic and open space ambiance of Larison's corner. The Isaac Corwin house (and its recent incarnations), the Sunnyside house, and the Sampson

Upcoming Programs

By Alison Dahl

The 2013 CHS program schedule launches on **Saturday, Feb. 16th** at the Larison Room in the Chester Library. To celebrate the month of February, Rick Busciglio of Memory Lane Productions will present "U.S. Presidents - Fun Facts and Myths" from 10 a.m. to noon. Join us, bring friends and family, and enjoy this upbeat, educational and entertaining event free of charge, with refreshments afterwards!

Future program plans (*most of which are open to the public*) include Larry Lowenthal's talk about Chester Railroads on May 11, guided tours of the Chester Furnace, Historic Downtown Chester, the Ralston Cider Mill and the Ralston General Store. Guest speakers will talk about "Chester's Iron Heyday" and "How to Protect and Preserve Family Memories and History". We'll host an "Antiques Show and Tell" and expose "The Best of the CHS Archives". And a very special interactive program about Abraham Lincoln will be offered.

Mark your calendars...

CHS programs will be held at the Library on the following dates, unless otherwise noted:

Saturday, February 16 from 10 a.m. to noon
Saturday, March 16 from 10 a.m. to noon
Saturday, April 27 from 10 a.m. to noon
Saturday, May 11 from 10 a.m. to noon
Thursday, June 13 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.
Thursday, July 11 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.
Thursday, August 8 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.
Saturday, October 12 from 10 a.m. to noon
Saturday, November 16 from 10 a.m. to noon

Special Events for CHS Members:

- Sunday, September 15 - Annual Summer Picnic - Location to be Announced
- Sunday, December 8 - Annual Holiday Celebration - Location to be Announced

Details on where and when we'll meet for the guided tours will be provided prior to scheduling -- stay tuned for these.

**Check our web site at
www.HistoricChesterNJ.com for program
announcements and details.**

Visioning for Larisons cont.

mentary elements: "historic", "a country feel" and "family friendly" in the sense of being wholesome, healthy and active.

The Board strongly urges Chester Borough's Governing Body to not only include those descriptors with a modern context in the collective vision for Larison's Turkey Farm Corner, but to make them the key descriptors for the vision that will guide the future of the site into the 21st century.

¹Article II, clause 4 of the Chester Historical Society Constitution reads: *The Society shall undertake to encourage the preservation of the artifacts, documents, historic buildings, monuments, and similar historic sites.*

²Abandoned Iron Mines of Chester Borough and Chester Township, Morris County, New Jersey 1979. State of New Jersey Dept. of Labor and Industry. The Sampson Mine at Larison's corner is described. http://67.18.219.83/image_hosting/web_pages/genimages1/books/abandoned-iron-mines-nj-morris-chester.pdf

³Inscription on a post card advertising Larison's Turkey Farm Inn from the 1950's.



Nearly a hundred interested residents, retailers, landlords, etc turned out for the two public meetings

Membership Report

By Marla Jackson

As of January 2013, membership in the Society stands at 74 "memberships." This represents about 110 individuals. The fun holiday party at Bernie's attracted several new members. We welcome new members at any time of the year.

Members are welcome to become involved in the society. Our latest undertaking involves cataloging and developing finding aids for the Archives.

Chester History Trail

The Chester History Trail is online at <http://chestertrails.org/themed-trails-and-points-of-interest/chester-history-trail/>. We will feature a site or two in each newsletter, helping to illustrate an article or just out of whimsy.

Set back on the lovely tree-shaded hillside next to the farm is "Sunnyside," built by James Topping in 1873 for his daughter-in-law, Nellie E. Topping, a young widow. Her daughter Leila became a concert pianist, traveled to



Russian, and eventually inherited both homes. Sunnyside was admired as one of the handsomest houses in Chester at the turn of the century. The Topping mine, worked between 1873 and 1883, was behind these buildings. The Larisons, whose Chester roots go back nine generations to the 1700's, purchased the farm and developed the Turkey Farm Inn.

This house was built by Isaac Corwin (1759-1830) who came to Chester about the time of the revolution. "The part brick and part stone rear wing with the free standing chimney... may remain from the earlier house... incorporated into the present house."



The stones from this earlier house, thought to be Benjamin Luse's farm house, have been used to build the wall in the main dining room. In 1829 the house was purchased by James Topping, a cabinet maker in Chester for many years in the 19th century. He used 2 rooms in the back wing as his workshop. The Toppings sold the property to the Larisons mid 20th century. Larison's Turkey Farm Inn would grow and prosper until the end of the 20th century, becoming a Chester icon.

"Hey Chester, Happy 150th Birthday!"

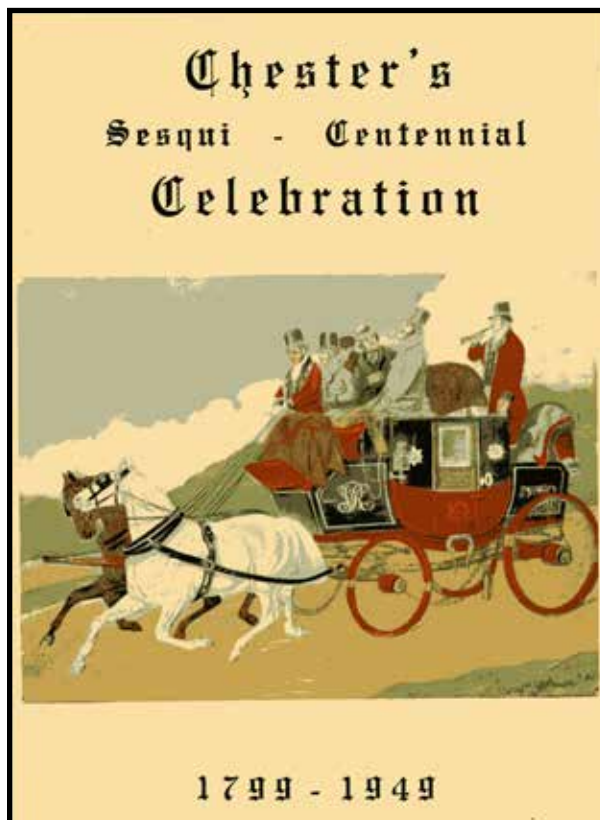
By Ed Ng

Thanks to the generosity of William P. Metger, CHS received an original copy of the 12 page program booklet that accompanied the celebration of Chester's Sesqui-Centennial in 1949. The booklet provides a view back to Chester in the post WWII era. Twelve members of the planning committee and fifteen participating organizations are listed. Some of the names on the planning committee I'm sure would evoke some interesting stories and memories.

Some of the names of the participating organizations have continued, such as the Boy and Girl Scouts. Others have changed, e.g. St. Joseph's Mission Church, and some have disappeared, like The Farnettes. Edwin Collis' informative "Short History of Chester Township" is in the booklet and it will be highlighted in a future article. Of course the main question I have, after examining the booklet, is who won the softball game The Farmerettes or the Walker Turner Manufacturing Company? As well as who won the 1949 Chevrolet?

CHS Officers

President.....	Ed Ng
Vice President.....	Alison Dahl
Treasurer.....	Anita Rhodes
Recording Secretary.....	Elaine Hanington
Corresponding Secretary.....	Lois Taylor
Archives.....	Ed Ng
Architectural Preservation.....	Matt Koppinger
Membership.....	Marla Jackson
Oral History.....	Helen Jones
Programs.....	Alison Dahl & Meryl Carmel
Historian.....	Ed Hanington (Borough)
Historian.....	Len Taylor (Township)
Member-at-Large.....	Helen Jones
Member-at-Large.....	Meryl Carmel



Sesqui-Centennial Booklet Cover