



NEWS & VIEWS

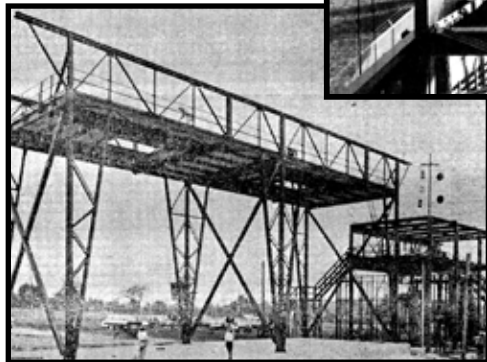
Summer 2013

Finding the Fantastic

By Edward Ng

Gold doubloons, crusted cannons, and silver bars are some of the treasures associated with ancient shipwrecks. I wasn't looking for any of those fabulous artifacts. I was looking for a very special ship, the only one of its kind. The ship I was looking for was 30 miles from the ocean and built by the phone company. There are pictures of the B.L.D.L.C.S. Fantastic, the Bell Labs Dry Land Cable Ship. But where exactly was it? There were pictures and an article in Life Magazine which wrote "To

save time and money, and permit studies of the problem under controlled conditions, a mock-up of a cable-laying



ship – dubbed the Fantastic—has been built on a New Jersey hilltop....Winches whine as long sections of cable are pulled up from the "hold" and played out "overboard" as if the Fantastic were truly at sea."

A September 1959 Observer Tribune article provides some clues to the location "When Bell Laboratories

men step "ashore" from the cable ship, they are 900 feet above sea level on the slopes of windy Telephone Hill in the Laboratories' 120 acre test center near Chester. Above them the structure stands 50 feet high, extending nearly 200 feet

from stem to stern." I searched available maps including the final plat for the 50 North Rd. property without finding Fantastic's "berth". Finally, a map in the 2009 "Preliminary Assessment Report – Lucent Tech-

Above: SS Fantastic Life Magazine Feb 1 1960

Left: Fantastic OT 1959 09 10

nologies, Inc. (Alcatel-Lucent Property)"

showed an outline of the "former cable ship" east of what is known as Swards Hill. Was "Telephone Hill" the same as Swards Hill? The 900 feet elevation was correct and a 200 foot ship could have reached from the spot to the side of Swards Hill.

A search of aerial photography on Bing.com was inconclusive, but Google's satellite photo showed evidence of construction in the right location. I will do ground truth in the fall. One mystery

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Design and Production by Amanda J. Dean

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Local History @ Bragg

By Heather Ronco

The objective of social studies education is to provide learners with the knowledge, skills and perspectives needed to become active, informed citizens and contributing members of local, state, national and global communities. For 3rd grade students at Bragg School this includes a unit on New Jersey and local Chester history.

The Chester Historical Society continues to facilitate this learning. For the second year, novice CHS member Heather Ronco visited each 3rd grade classroom and presented a simplified version of Chester history focusing on the settlement of a rural farming community in the 18th century and the impact of the iron boom of the 19th century.

Students enjoyed viewing photos of familiar buildings now imbued with historical significance. They examined artifacts from the CHS archives, including iron ore and slag. They flexed their muscles lifting a 27 lb iron ingot. They eagerly examined a map showing the locations of iron mines to see if any were near their homes. And one enterprising youth asked where he could sell some iron if he dug some out of his backyard!

Each student was given "Chester Bingo" to share with their families and extend their learning. It encourages them to explore historical sites around Chester. Two weeks after the presentation, teachers have reported students enthusiastically sharing accounts of their journeys completing the

bingo board. Through this effort, we have reached 130 students and their families and hope they have a new appreciation and respect for the history that surrounds them every day. "Students who visited every site were recognized at an awards ceremony in June as Chester Junior Historians (see photo)".



Above: Junior Historians from Bragg School

Front Row, left to right: Juliana Marran, Gaby Aquino, Kelly Dugan, Laurel Haynes

Middle Row: Jake Marsh, Sinclair Stevens, Kaci Russo, Ann Hoye
Back Row: Heather Ronco, presenter and coordinator of the project, Aidan Mulligan, Noah Golabek, Remy Porfido, Kyleigh Kennington, Samantha Marran and Michele Stanton, principal of Bragg School.

Left: Satellite Photo site mystery annotated

Fantastic cont.

solved. Another mystery awaits: the 1959 Observer Tribune article writes of the Fantastic, "The structure is the only one of its kind in the world. It stands several hundred yards from the underground "dry land ocean," another unique Bell Laboratories facility, which was announced last year". OK an underground dry land ocean by Bell Labs, this I've got to find also.



Our Early Days in Chester

By Lois and Len Taylor

When the Taylors first arrived in town in the summer of 1964, our realtor, Ken Muller, had just started excavations for the Mt. View drive development. He told us while we were riding with him to see two houses on Furnace Road that we need not even look unless we were making \$10,000 a year. We told him to watch the road.

The first house had a **huge** barn that resembled an aircraft hanger. It was so big that you could not see from one end to the other on foggy days. The owners wanted \$23,500 for the property and the taxes were \$800 per year. Of that amount, \$200.00 was for the barn. We decided we did not need the barn taxes and told the realtor to move on. (The barn was removed and re-assembled in Flanders, off Trade Center Drive. It is there today.)

The realtor then showed us the house we bought, even though we were third in line for refusal when we signed up. It came with fifty-four acres which included the Chester Furnace site, although we didn't know that at the time. A couple of weeks after we closed, the State of New Jersey came knocking with condemnation papers.....they were taking all but one and one-half acres of the site. They reimbursed the seller \$200 per acre for the taking and he reduced our purchase price by half that amount.

The house was the summer home of an Irvington couple. They closed the house up for the winter with the shutters that still work. He owned a truck body shop, so the amenities in the house were mostly fabricated from sheet metal. The kitchen sink was a monster tub, made from an old truck body. The furnace ducts are beautifully crafted aluminum, not galvanized steel. The water tank was a big old air compressor tank....also huge. We arrived only a few years after a well had been drilled; prior to that, the water supply came by gravity down the hill from the Hedges Mine overflow to a silt settling cistern and then by pipes to three houses along Furnace Road. A big water tank was a storage "must." All of the electric wiring was commercial grade. The service for 1964 was enormous at 100 amps.

The buried oil tank had a 1,500 gallon capacity, because in 1964 you could buy your oil cheaper in the summer and it paid to "stock up." There was a gasoline generator the size of a Volkswagon in the garage. No insulation. Uneven water pressure. Inadequate heating. Telephones were six party lines with poles that occasionally just fell over and service that failed if someone spit in the street. Hunters parked in our driveway and cleaned their kills in our yard. In addition to the bears, deer and coyotes we have now, there were rattlesnakes, copperheads, minks, weasels and bobcats in the woods.

When Lois shopped at the IGA next door to the Chester Inn (Publik House), the customers stopped like statues when she spoke in her Southern accent. It was as though E.F. Hutton were doing a T.V. advertisement. Cassie Bowers, the local gossip columnist for the Observer called....you could call around Chester with the

last four digits of the phone number..... and asked if we were the couple who bought that run-down wreck on Furnace Road.

Interestingly, we did have several home delivery services that have gone the way of the dial phone. They included Epstein's department store, milk, baked goods, dry cleaners, "Charles Chips," diaper service and a knife sharpener guy. It was kind of nice.

And so we started the transformation. We are still going at it fifty years later. The house has been through three different colors, two roofs and four kitchens. Over the years almost all of the plumbing has been replaced, along with much of the wiring. We built two small additions. The electric service has been upgraded. The generator is gone. With a few exceptions, the building is fully insulated. We have two and one-half baths now instead of one. And the original garage door has been automated.

We would like to make "Our Early Days in Chester" a recurring feature in the Historical Society Newsletter. Please write us a letter about your early days in Chester and we will publish them. Email them to chester.historical.society@gmail.com or mail them to Chester Historical Society, PO Box 376, Chester, NJ 07930.

Community Survey

*"A vision without actions is a daydream
Actions without a vision is a nightmare"
(Old Japanese proverb)*

What is your vision for the future of the Chesters? What do you love about the Chesters? What would you recommend to enhance the quality of life in the Chesters?

Chester Borough and Chester Township received a 2012 Sustainable Jersey Small Grant for the Green Teams to develop a "Community Vision" and identify supporting objectives. Green Team volunteers will work with the public and community groups to develop a vision statement that could be used in the future by the Borough and the Township to consider policies for addressing sustainability and quality of life enhancements for the two communities.

Please join us in this exciting venture and add your voice to shape the future of our community. The Green Team is interested in your opinion-

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Programs and Events

By Alison Dahl

CHS programs from February to June covered a wide gamut of history. Chester resident **Rick Busciglio** had us chuckling all through his program “**U.S. Presidents: Fun Facts and Myths**” from Washington to Obama. Thank you Grover Cleveland for creating a controversy on even how the presidents are numbered. Continuing the presidential theme, educator **Cynthia Winslow** presented a fascinating talk on “**Lincoln Remembered: Lincoln’s Whistle Stop Tour to Washington, 1861**”. Abe Lincoln traveled by train from Springfield, IL to Washington DC for his first inauguration. Due to the intervention of famous 19th century detective Allan Pinkerton and America’s first female detective, Kate Warne, he survived an assassination plot that had it succeeded would have changed the course of US history.

“**Ere the Shadows Fade: New Jersey’s Civil War Era Photographers**” was presented by photographer and historian **Gary Saretzky**. He explained how portraiture photography was widely practiced by professionals in the early 1840s using the daguerreotype process. The best photographers often had professional art training and produced truly artistic, meticulously arranged photographs in formal photography galleries, and sold for a handsome price.

On the other hand, itinerant photographers roamed the countryside carrying their equipment and chemicals in horse drawn wagons, applying their knowledge of the daguerreotype process, but with little artistry that captured, at best, a likeness of the subject. The Civil War spawned what became “picture hunger”, as soldiers going off to war desired to leave their families with a photo of themselves, and keep photos of their families with them as personal mementos while fighting the war. Many of the photographers had New Jersey connections or base of operation.

The Chester Library and the Society’s May program featured former Chester resident and retired National Park Service historian **Larry Lowenthal**, who presented “**History of Chester’s Railroads**”. Mr. Lowenthal described how two major rail companies served this area, com-

monly called the “Central” and the “Lackawanna”. The Central ran north of Main Street and the Lackawanna went by what is now Bernies Hillside.

Questions remain regarding how the rail network developed along the routes it did, but it is clear a major influence was the growth of the 19th century iron mining industry. Remnants of where the rail lines intersected can be found today in the vicinity of the Chester Furnace (see related story in this issue.) An interesting study of the Chester Railroad can be found in Mr. Lowenthal’s book, *Chester’s Iron Heyday*, which is published by and available through the Chester Historical Society.

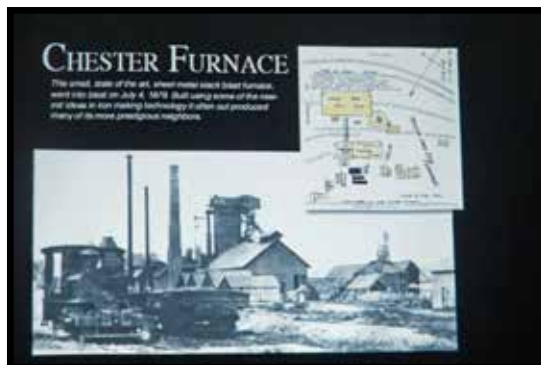
Every seat in the Larison Room was taken as mining buffs attended the Society’s June program “**Iron Making and Mining in Morris County**” presented by **Joe Macasek**. “With the completion of the Morris Canal in 1831, the mining business began to expand. Hundreds of tons of ore were brought by wagon from mines in the area to the Morris Canal for shipment to iron forges in the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania” Mr. Macasek explained. Then in the

1870s, when the Central Railroad of New Jersey’s High Bridge Branch reached Chester, the village became

an iron mining boom town, and the Chester Furnace was established. It is estimated that more than 55 million tons of ore were mined and shipped from

the Morris County area. Mr. Macasek’s talk illuminated where the mines are located, what kinds of technology were employed, and the life and work of the miners back then.

The railroad and mining programs serve as introductions to the **Chester Furnace Tour** which will be conducted by **Chester Township Historian Len Taylor**. The Furnace Tour be held after damage to the site from Sandy is fixed. Stay tuned for upcoming Chester Furnace Tour announcements.



Left: Chester Furnace slide J Macasek

Below: Chester Railroads Larry Lowenthal



Mark Your Calendars

By Alison Dahl

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

- Thursday, August 8th
from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.
- Saturday, October 12th
from 10 a.m. to noon
- Saturday, November 16th
from 10 a.m. to noon

Special Events for CHS Members:

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

While working on the archives inventory, Alison Dahl came across this poem by Carmen Smith before she married. Carmen was president of the Society from 1982-1988. In 1999 she was named as a Living Treasure of Morris County.

George Washington

*This is my etching --
I'm not an artist
Skilled to scratch with tiny point
On copper dipped in wax,
Nor can I paint in oils,
Nor dash off pictures formed in printed words.
I am a teacher,
Scarcely past the threshold of this ancient craft.
I try to show that 2X being 6, then X is 3,
And point the order that exists in all!*

*But to my etching --
This planter was a large and powerful man,
Who rode his horses, hunted fox,
Who gamed and dined,
And often entertained with stately balls.
He loved his lands, his farms and fields,
His wife, her children,
And enjoyed his friends.
Daily he wrote with care just how the time was spent.
His records of his crops, his lands, his slaves
Are all so kept that every item of his wealth is known.
Each day,
When off at war,
He wrote to Congress all details
Of marches, battles, war supplies and men.
Meticulous the care with which
Each task he undertook was done.
In him,
I see precision, neatness, clarity of thought --
An ordered mind -- not great,
But so controlled that he could cope with all.*

*If through my teaching,
I could so instill in just these average kids
Whose studies fill my day,
A tiny bit of what I see in him --
Then,
Tables, rules, and theorems all aside,
I've taught these children
Something
Which will live.*

Carmen A. Helmer (Undated)

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