

CHATHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER



*Join us for our annual joint
program between the
Chatham Historical Society
and Chatham Township*

Historical Society

Sunday April 18th

2:00pm

via Zoom

“Mills of the Passaic”

Facilitated by Dr. Maria

Masucci, Professor of

Anthropology and

Archaeology

Drew University

**Zoom details on our website and
will be emailed to members.**

GERRY'S CORNER

by Gerry Geisler

Welcome to Gerry's Corner. Normally I like to take a look back at the past, musing on a post card or other items of historical interest from my collection of things with a Chatham connection. It's fun to look back and speculate about what once was. But history is not just behind us. Tomorrow's history is happening today.

It is easy to look back and recognize some of the key events that were truly significant in our history. Key events for my generation include the Kennedy assassination, the Vietnam War, and the Apollo 11 trip to the moon. When looking back at these events, it's easy to find newspaper accounts, and even film records.

Other events experienced in my time have started out slowly and built to have a major impact on our lives. The ready availability of cell phones is an example. Cell phones have changed the way we communicate and impacted the way that we live. When I was in grade school, the television was full of ads from the Phone Company (the Bell System - there was just one "phone company" back then) extolling the virtues of additional extension phones for your home as the latest modern convenience. Today, many homes don't even have a "land line," let alone any extensions! It can be hard to recognize the significance of an event such as the invention of the cell phone while you are living it; it is in looking back that the true impact becomes apparent.

In 2020-21 we are experiencing events which are truly significant and of clear historic importance. The Covid-19 pandemic is impacting the world in a way not seen since the Spanish Flu of 1918-1919. The events of the recent presidential election have had emotions running high for many. We are living historic events in a way that is more apparent and intense than many of us have seen before.

All of this will be recorded in the newspapers (those that still publish!), online, and in video records. These mediums will provide a record of the overall impact of events on society as a whole, but what of the impact of current events on the individual? How does the current situation directly affect each and every one of us?

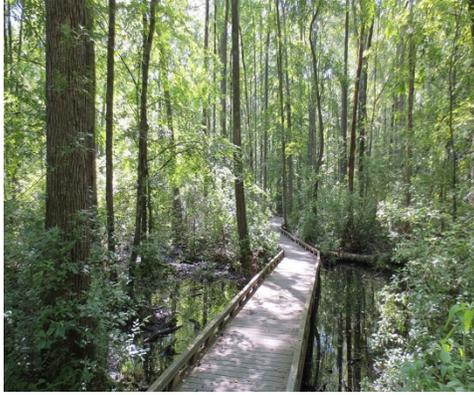
We are all seeing and experiencing these events each in our own way. How many of us will take time to make even the briefest notes on the impact that we have seen in our daily lives?

It is important that as many of us as possible take the time to note some of what we are each experiencing at this time. Whether you keep a diary or a blog, or even just a few simple notes. In my collection I have a wall calendar from 1943, maintained by a New Jersey housewife during the heart of WWII. On each day there are notes about anything from the latest news to which items were in short supply at the store, price changes, and the availability of ration cards. This simple document provides one of the most interesting insights into civilian life at that time that I have ever found.

It has often been said that the victors write the history of any war. I say that those who bother to write it down determine the future perception of any event. So take a few moments to write it down!

Finding an Angel

by Liz Holler



Great Swamp NJ

Over the decades, people walking or driving near the Great Swamp, have claimed to see a Headless Hessian, Big Foot, and the ever-popular Swamp Devil. A dinosaur mammoth skeleton was discovered in 1908 in the Swamp.

In December 1934, Chatham illustrator, Charles Weimer came upon another “rogue creature” while walking the Great Swamp. Discovering a nest of semi-wild kittens, one black kitten particularly caught his attention. Unlike his siblings, this kitten had no tail. He just seemed extremely different. Mr. Weimer gathered the odd little creature and carried him home to his art studio. It became referred to as “Swamp Angel” or just plain “Peter.”

As Peter grew, Mr. Weimer noticed rabbit characteristics developing. Peter only had claws on his front paws. He couldn't climb. Peter had a normal cat's head, but from the shoulders back, he resembled a rabbit. Peter hopped on all fours. At times, Peter could sit back on his broad hind legs and maneuver like a kangaroo. When hungry, he would squawk, not meow.

Peter became the unofficial mascot of Mr. Weimer's art studio, along with the artist's black shepherd dog “Ebony.” When Peter was allowed outside for fresh air, he would often lose his sense of direction beyond 50 feet of the house. Someone would have to rescue him.

A reporter from the Morris County Daily Record and other visitors stopped by to see this unique pet.

A curator of reptiles and mammals, Raymond L. Dittmars, was contacted to see if it was possible for an animal to be half cat and half rabbit. Dr. Dittmars expressed doubt; however, expressed interest in examining Peter someday.

Peter, the Swamp Angel, whatever his parentage was, lived a long and comfortable life thanks to the kindness of Mr. Weimer.

House History Program

by Karen Franklin

The House History Program provides guidance to residents who wish to learn how to research the history of their homes.

Upon completion of the research as outlined in the Adopt-A-House packet, researchers have the option to purchase a recognition marker through the Historical Society, suitable for displaying on, or in, their home.

Karen Franklin, our House History Chair, would be happy to help you to navigate this interesting process. You can contact Karen at Chathamnjhistory@gmail.com. Make your home a part of Chatham's history!



Annual May Dinner Canceled

Due to the COVID concerns and restrictions currently in place, we will not be able to hold our Annual May Dinner responsibly. We look forward to a return to events and programs in person at some point in the future. Please know we miss seeing you and hope you stay healthy and safe!



The Home of J.W. Hoff
Mount Ave. Chatham, N.J.



Our yearly membership renewal is coming up soon. Keep an eye out for it at the beginning of May in your mailboxes. Please consider renewing your membership so that you remain on our mailing list and can take advantage of all of the benefits of membership!

Mills on the Passaic River

by Susan Allen

The Chatham Historical Society was contacted this past summer by a student from Drew University seeking information about mills on the Passaic River. She was particularly interested in the Stanley Mill, which was located near Stanley Park on River Road. Her Digital Archaeology class had explored the shoreline and found various artifacts. She was interested in the oldest photos that the Society possessed of the Stanley Mill and any other information about what was manufactured in the area.



The best source for this type of information tends to be the Fishawack Papers, the origin of which was the result of a New Jersey statewide initiative begun in 1961 to prepare for the 1964 Tercentenary of New Jersey. Throughout New Jersey, representatives of churches, clubs, service organizations, school groups and historical societies were appointed to compile their histories. The Chatham Press reported in December 1962, that the Chatham Historical Society planned to coordinate producing a "Volume of the History of Chatham." Author John Cunningham used this information to write a book about Chatham's history titled Chatham: At the Crossing of the Fishawack. All the gathered manuscripts were bound and placed on permanent display for the use of "future scholars and historians." Thus, the Fishawack Papers was born – all 14 volumes!

It was in the Fishawack Papers that Mrs. C. William Morgan wrote an extensive article tracing the history of commerce created by the mills on the Passaic River in Chatham. As early as 1737, William Broadwell purchased land above the Day home and built the first mill. By 1806, Chatham Township, as it was known, "contained ten stores, one fulling mill (a process of pounding loosely woven wool cloth into a felt), two saw mills and two grist mills. The total population is 2,138." There were mills at four different points on the Passaic River producing flour and paper, while the town's commerce included three blacksmiths' shops, two harness factories and numerous greenhouses. There was even a mill that functioned as a saw mill and a cider mill, the latter of which produced whiskey that was sold in Chatham. Mrs. Morgan quotes an unknown contemporary historian about Chatham in 1874, who commented: "Chatham – its destiny is to be a manufacturing village with outlying suburbs on the hills."

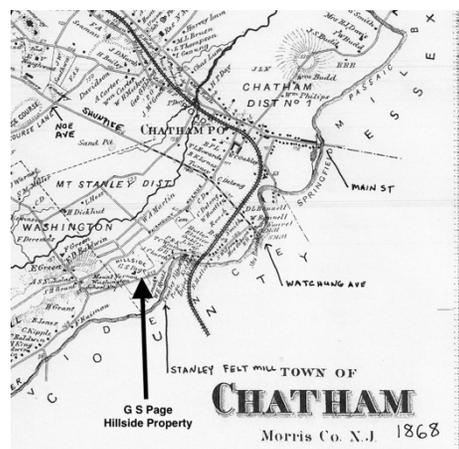
The Stanley Mill, owned by George Shepard Page, was located on the Passaic River at Chatham Borough's southern-most border between the Borough and Township. By damming up the Passaic River, the mill, located near Stanley Park on River Road, used both water and steam to annually produce 1,000 tons of tar roofing paper.



Photos of mills courtesy of The Chatham Historical Society
Photos of artifacts courtesy of Drew Archaeology Department



The Drew archaeologists found many artifacts and had many questions. The Chatham Township Historical Society and Sarah Stanley, a Page family descendant, were interviewed for more background and history of the Mills. The students have taken the information obtained through the study of the artifacts, historical research and oral histories and have created an online virtual exhibit that will be available to the public. There are still questions left to answer, including why there was a large collection of suspender clasps found at the site (usually associated with upper class men's clothing), and the story behind a bottle labeled "B.M. Dickenson, Chatham. "



WE NEED YOU!

Do you like Chatham, history or just have a little extra time and want to be more involved? We could use your help! We are looking for members that want to become more involved with the Historical Society!

Membership Chair
Committee Members

Researchers

Organizers

Anyone that has a little extra time to help out!

Please contact Karen Hoerrner or Deb Fabian at

chathamnjhistory@gmail.com



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*Please check our website frequently
for up-to-date information about
our programs and activities.*

ChathamNJhistoricalSociety.org

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Chatham Historical Society