



UNION COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



President's Message



Happy 2023 to all! I hope it is a healthy and productive year for you!

As expected a new year often brings changes and 2023 is no different. The Union County Historical Society recently learned that the Union County Board of Commissioners is considering a new seal for the county. The current seal, a dramatization of Hannah Caldwell's murder just after the Battle of Connecticut Farms on June 7, 1780, by a British or Hessian soldier, was authorized almost 100 years ago in 1933 by the Board of Chosen Freeholders after an exhaustive study and with recommendations by the county historical society as well as input from the Board's members.

While there is no disagreement that the seal does not

historically portray Mrs. Caldwell's murder, there is a great deal of symbolism and meaning to the seal as her tragic death spurred renewed morale among the Continental troops and gave them a boost at the Battle of Springfield a few weeks later—the last major battle to be fought in New Jersey and, to many historians, the turning point of the War for Independence. Both Hannah and her husband, Rev. James Caldwell, were patriots who gave their lives to the cause. Hannah was also the mother of nine children.

New Jersey is often considered the crossroads of the American Revolution and what is now Union County was at the center of the conflict. Even George Washington later acknowledged in a letter, "No area suffered greater deprivations than Elizabethtown." A seal reflects the major contributions as well as the uniqueness of a county with a diverse population. We urge the Board to reach out to stakeholders as well as their county Cultural and Heritage Advisory Committee for their input for a seal as they did 90 years ago. The knowledge and experience of the historical community both at the county and local level is a valuable

resource to be used for everyone's benefit. We invite you to join your voice with ours.

Joanne Rajoppi
President

COVER GIRLS SING AT HOLIDAY PARTY

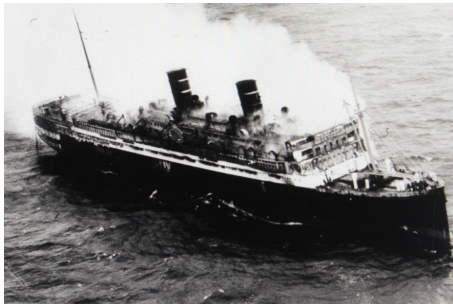
The Union County Historical Society welcomed the Cover Girls, a dynamic twosome, to perform at our December 11th holiday party.

Union County residents Kathy Martin and Mary Damato, performed holiday songs from the 1940s through the current decade entertaining guests. We also enjoyed Kathy and Mary giving us the historical background of each of the songs! The performance was followed by a sampling of holiday foods—all agreed were delicious.



Bill Frolich's Thoughts About the Last 100 Years (continued)

On September 8, 1934 there was a disaster that filled the columns of the newspapers. This was the story of the fire onboard the steamship Morro Castle, while she was steaming eight miles off the New Jersey shore, returning from a cruise in the Caribbean Sea. It was a story of, "If anything could go wrong, it did.". A fire of undetermined origin was started and soon spread throughout the ship, fed by inflammatory material used in her construction. Compartment doors were poorly designed and did not completely seal off any area, thus allowing air to reach the

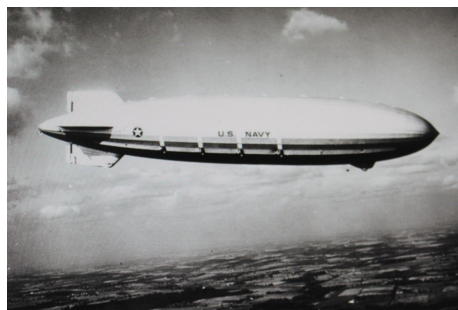


fire. Only one S.O.S. was sent out before the entire electrical system failed. The fire water pumps lost pressure and were of little value. The order to abandon ship was given late, and half of the lifeboats could not be lowered. Those that were lowered were only half-filled, and many people jumped off the ship to escape the flames. Some even made it to the beach. Rescue vessels arrived late and could do little.

By morning the still-smoldering Morro Castle had drifted to the beach and had run aground only ten feet from the Convention Center at Asbury Park, where it lay for

months. It became a tourist attraction, and souvenir shops set up business on the boardwalk. Post cards were sold, and for a small sum you could have your copper penny pressed into an oval shape bearing an image of the scene. However, on March 14, 1935, the burned out wreck was pulled from its sandy berth and towed away to a scrap yard.

The following year the German rigid airship Hindenburg commenced a season long series of successful flights carrying passengers between Germany and Lakehurst, New Jersey. We were familiar with such airships, having seen the arrival of the German built ZR3, as it was delivered October 15, 1924, to the US Navy as partial reparations of the World War. It flew directly over our house as we watched it. It became known as the USS Los Angeles. We had heard about the crash of the Shenandoah in Ohio on September 3, 1925, and had visited the Akron in the immense hangar at Lakehurst, where she had lain next to the de-commissioned Los Angeles. We had seen the Akron occasionally during vacations at Lavallette, and the Blimp J-3 appeared almost daily. Both had crashed into the ocean off New Jersey on April 4, 1933. The J-3 crashed while trying rescue operations for the Akron.



At that time there was a nine hundred foot tall radio mast in Tuckerton, New Jersey. Built by the Germans before the World War, it rested on three large solid glass balls and was supported by many guy wires. Confiscated during the war, it was now run by RCA as a relay station for messages coming from overseas. One day a friend took my father and me out to visit this lonely relay station. It was quite noisy inside, with many telegraph keys clattering away as they relayed messages. A worker there told us that this was the first station to receive the distress calls from the Akron as it crashed into the ocean.

However, the world of rigid airships came to a shocking end on May 6, 1937, when the Hindenburg caught fire and



crashed to earth while attempting to land at Lakehurst. Somehow, a fire broke out near the tail section, and in less than one minute the hydrogen-filled airship completely collapsed on the ground. Of the 97 persons on board the airship, 35 were killed, and one person on the ground was killed. 62 survived the disaster.