



UNION COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



May Meeting

The Society meeting of May 16, 2021 was held as scheduled outdoors in a very large tent on the grounds of the Liberty Hall Museum, with everyone observing proper social distancing. It was preceded by the meeting of the Executive Board, where some matters were discussed and acted upon.

Because of the virus there will be no Student Awards this year, but our annual picnic is still for September 12 at the Hanson House backyard. It is hoped that by that time that conditions will have improved to allow this outdoor event.

The Society will also try to improve communications with other local historical societies.

There was a slight change in the scheduled program, as the intended speaker was not available, but we had a great variety of "show and tell" items. Laid out on the tables were old maps of this area, old out of print books such as records or the Presbyterian Church of Westfield from 1728 to 1928. Another book contained American marriage records of before 1699. Also on display was a large clay jug made years ago in a pottery works on Water Street (now Elizabeth Avenue) near Broad Street in Elizabeth.

Some members gave very interesting explanations and details about the items they had brought, while others just left them on the tables for our examination.





Pictures From Our Files

Pictured above is one of the earliest houses built in Elizabeth, and known as the Crane House. It stood on the point of land formed by the crossing of Cherry Street by Morris Avenue, not far from the Township of Union. Built by and for the Crane family, it was occupied by them for more than two hundred years.

It was of a colonial design, common in New Jersey, with one main section, complete with "eye-brow" windows and one small wing used as the kitchen. In the front yard was a well with a rather unusual pump as it had a long loop of chain to which many cups were fastened. The lower loop of this chain descended into the well water and a hand crank drove the chain and brought up water-filled cups that dumped their load into a waiting container.

The south end of this yard had an old barn and a corn-crib, and a low hedge marked the boundary lines of this property. However, by the 1920s this hedge had grown so tall that a step-ladder was needed in order to trim it.

Around 1928 the Sun Oil Company obtained a ten-year lease to use the pointed end of the property for a Sunoco gas station. The company

built a small office, installed a hydraulic lift, several pumps, and a large, diamond shaped sign on a pole at the pointed end of the land.

For ten years the station was un-profitable and when the lease was up, the company cleaned out the lift, the pumps and the sign, but left the concrete curbing and the small office.

The land lay idle for a couple of years, and one night there was a loud, scraping sound coming from it, about two o'clock in the morning. A car driver making a turn from Morris into Cherry had missed the turn and had driven over the former concrete base of the sign and was now stuck with all four wheels off of the ground. It is not known how it escaped, but by daylight the car was gone.

Finally a convenience store took over and moved into the small office. Later the old barn was torn down and the corn-crib was loaded on a truck and moved to the Miller-Cory Museum in Westfield, but the empty Crane House remained.

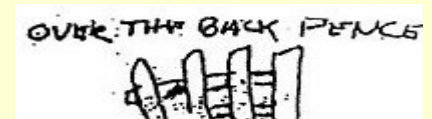
The end came when a bank bought the property for a branch office and the house was torn down for driveways and parking lot. Efforts to move it to the Liberty Hall Museum were unsuccessful.

That 1799 Debt Book that the Society purchased a few weeks ago from its former owner has recently been loaned to the Elizabeth Public Library where it will be available for research, should anyone be so interested. It has been turned over to Aimee Fernandez-Puente, the Supervisor of Local History & Special Collections Department. This two-hundred-twenty-two year-old book is in rather delicate condition and already several pages are missing and lost. It will need special care in its handling to prevent further damage.

However, careful reading of its handwritten information may be able to shed light on some of the early years of our country and on some of its families and residents. There are many historically famous names written on its pages, complete with many fancy flourishes in the writing.

The story of the Christmas Day snowstorm in the recent edition of the newsletter evoked an interesting related story from one of our members who reported that he had just been born at that time, and his parents had had a very difficult journey getting home from the hospital with their new baby.

Although the snow had stopped falling, many of the roads were still clogged with piled snow and abandoned poorly parked vehicles waiting to be removed. Many roads were still unplowed and it took them hours to get home.



Times have changed. Now you can't walk into a bank without a mask;