



UNION COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



A Year In Review

As we are about to start a new year, it seems to be a time to look back and see what the Society has done during the preceding one.

At the start of the year our display case in the Hanson House featured the Singer Company, including a number of the tools used by the machinists to build and repair the machines used to make the company's world-famous sewing machines.

The winter ice and snow storms shut down some of the operations at the Hanson House, but the staff members managed to keep things going, and by Spring we were ready for our Annual Dinner. Here the program featured a review of Les Sargent's work about the Medal of Honor recipients from Union County. His efforts resulted in a stone monument bearing their names being placed on the grounds of the Court House.

Also about this time the Society announced that we now had a website, where activities of the Society will be readily available to anyone who may be interested.

Society members also took part in the Four Centuries in a Weekend program. During the latter part of the year the staff has been very busy handling requests from companies for pictures that they can use to adorn their office walls. Our results have been quite satisfactory, both to them, and to us.



December Meeting

The December meeting was also our annual Holiday Party, where the membership enjoyed good food and good pleasantries with friends. The program was presented by Joe & Tina Renna, authors of a book about the Peterstown section of Elizabeth. This program had been originally scheduled for last February, but had been postponed because of the heavy snows of that time. We were fortunate in that it could be re-scheduled.

Christmas Long Ago

There was a time long ago when no one thought of Christmas until Halloween and Thanksgiving Day had passed, but today the stores feature Christmas sales as early as the middle of October. It was different years ago.

Back then December was a rough month to a small child who knew that he had to be on

his best behavior for the next three weeks, or Santa Claus would not bring him any longed-for presents.

He was well aware that Christmas was coming, for the big stores down town had changed their front window displays and now featured Santa Claus's helpful elves busy making the toys that would be delivered the night before Christmas. Electric trains also were running by themselves on the tracks set in the model villages nearby.

Even Santa himself might be found in some stores, but why wasn't he up in the North Pole preparing for the big day?

As the days went by, things at home began to change. The old evergreen tree in the yard lost a few of its small branches as decorations here and there in the house. Their pleasant odor competed with the aroma of the cookies baking in the kitchen ovens. The spices of the plum puddings also added to the

mouth-watering atmosphere.

The mandatory letter to Santa Claus, pleading the recent good behavior, and asking for desired gifts had been written, and the well-worn copy of "The Night Before Christmas" had been read and re-read, and now it finally was Christmas Eve.

Christmas Eve was the longest night of the year to a small child. Bed-time came early, but sleep was disturbed by the sounds of the unusual movements of the grown-ups in the rest of the house.

Finally it was morning, and time to get up and arouse Father and Mother to see what Santa might have brought. Never mind the sleepy-eyed protests of the parents; it was CHRISTMAS.

Somehow, a room below downstairs had been changed magically with a tall evergreen tree standing in a corner. On its branches were flashing lights and shiny colored balls.



By the fireplace were all the gaily wrapped presents that Santa had brought. There was no doubt that he had actually come down the chimney, for there on the hearthstone was his sooty footprint! The cookies and milk left for him were gone. How all this had happened in a single night did not matter. Santa was indeed magical.

Pictures From Our Files

Pictured here is a well-house, typical of the many that once graced the yards of most houses years ago. It is shown complete with its windlass, rope, and bucket.



In the good old days before city water was piped into houses the main source of drinking water came from wells such as this one. As an open well it is surrounded with a protective wall to keep stray animals, people, and other items from falling into it. A roof overhead also helps to keep the water clean.

In use, a heavy, iron-bound, oaken bucket would be lowered into the water, and, given a little slack, the bucket would tip over on its side and be filled with cool water, and then be withdrawn from the well, by means of the windlass.

Another method of drawing water was the use of a well-sweep. A pole, several feet long, was set in the ground a slight distance from the well, and a long cross-arm was pivoted at its top, somewhat like a see-saw, but with one long arm and one short arm.

A length of rope was tied to the tip of the long arm, and a bucket was fastened to the lower end, and centered over the well. The short arm was counter-weighted to equal the

weight of the long arm and the weight of a bucket of water.

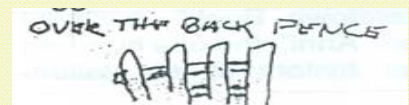
In use, a person pulled, with little effort, the long arm down, thus lowering the bucket into the well-water. The counter-weight was then allowed to raise the loaded bucket up from the well.

A well-sweep could be constructed using material readily available almost every where, but for a continuous flow of water a pump was needed. One common type was a hand-operated pitcher pump with a cylinder, valves and a piston connected to a pipe set in the well. Moving the handle up and down drew water from the well.

A less common item was a chain pump, that used a loop of chain to which a number of cups were fastened. The chain, looped over a hand-cranked sprocket in the pump housing, hung down into the well-water, and each turn of the crank brought up cup after cup of water that spilled from the pump and the cups passed over the sprocket.

Another Year Gone Bye

They say, "Time flies when you are having fun" so it would seem that we had a lot of fun last year, as it is that time of the year when again dues are due and payable, in order to keep our society up and running for the year of 2015. An addressed envelope and renewal slip are enclosed for your convenience.



Barbara Sokol, computer specialist in our office, says there's never a problem with an obstinate computer, there is always a way.