



UNION COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



February Meeting Cancelled

After being postponed from the original date of February 2, the meeting was rescheduled for the Hanson House on the 16th of that month. Unfortunately, by the 12th of February a very nasty snow storm was predicted for the weekend and members of the Executive Board had to consult by telephone as to whether or not to cancel the meeting. The consensus was that, in the interests of safety and probable lack of parking space at snow covered curbs and driveway, it would be better to call off the meeting.

Immediately phone calls were made to as many of the members as could be reached, passing the word.

Although considerable effort had been made to publicize the intended program for the afternoon, that, too, had to be cancelled. It had been about a new book by author Joe Renna, entitled "The Peterstown Book", subtitled "Cent' Anni" the one hundred year history of an Italian-American neighborhood.

The Peterstown area is one of the many neighborhoods that have grown up through the years in Elizabeth, as European immigrants tended to live with other members from the old country. Its boundaries are roughly west of Atlantic Street to South Spring Street and from First Avenue to the river. It was developed in the late 1800s by John and George Peters, who

owned most of the land. The program may be re-scheduled for some date in the future.

April Meeting

The next meeting of the Society will be held on April 6, 2014, at 2 pm in the Garden Restaurant on Magie Avenue in Elizabeth, near the Union border. This will be our annual anniversary dinner, celebrating 145 years of existence of the society.

The program for the day will be presented by Les Sargent, and will concern the Medal of Honor recipients from Union County. Les was very instrumental in getting the Freeholders to establish a monument to them on the grounds of the Court House.

It is necessary that we have at least thirty members at the dinner, which must be paid for in advance, using the enclosed flyer and envelope. Please reply early, and relieve the minds of the staff.

New Books in Our Library

Recently, five books of history were added to our library in the Hanson House. The books were the gift from Joseph Koles, Dick Koles brother, who has given us other books now and then.

One of them, *Poland and the American Revolutionary War*, by Miecislaus Haiman, was written in 1932 for the 200th birthday celebration of George Washington, an event noted

throughout our country.

Another book, *Year of the Hangman*, written by Glenn F. Williams, is about a campaign by Washington against the Iroquois in the Revolution.

The *Burning of Washington* by Anthony S. Pitch concerns the British invasion of 1814, and it has a very detailed story of the attack on Fort McHenry, whose defense prevented the British Ships from entering the harbor.

Mosby's Rangers, by James J. Williamson, who was a member of those Rangers, was written in 1896 from the diaries that he had kept during the Civil War. This book is a reprint of the original first edition.

The fifth and last book is entitled, *April 1865*, written by Jay Winik, and sub-titled *The Month that Saved America*. It is about the end of the Civil War and what might have led to a different conclusion.

Rajoppi's New Book

In the January issue of the newsletter of the League of Historical Societies of New Jersey almost half a page was given to Joanne Rajoppi's new book, *New Brunswick and the Civil War*. This non-fiction work tells the story of the author's great-grandfather, John P. Hamilton and his friends who became involved in the Civil War. It is based on the letters from those who wrote home during the war.

Joanne has spent a couple of years putting this book together, and more time in publicizing it by speaking at several club meetings. A slide show has been a feature of her talks.



Pictures From Our Files

It's winter again, and time to do a little reminiscing. Back in the good old days, it would be time to get out the long ice saws, and be ready to cut the ice from any frozen stream of lake worthy of its name.

On the eastern shore of Ursino Lake once stood this five story ice house, waiting to be re-filled with blocks of ice being sawn from the many inches-thick frozen surface of the lake. If the weather stayed cold, more ice would be cut from the re-frozen surface, and perhaps enough ice could be stored to last until the next winter.

There were no refrigerators in the homes in those days, and the ice was distributed by the ice-man with his horse and wagon. Fifty cents would buy a block of ice big enough to last about three days in a metal lined oaken ice box.

As time went by, and large blocks of ice could be produced commercially, the old ice-house was no longer needed, and on a dark night around 1928, it was totally destroyed by fire. Within days, the charred remains were cleared away, and now even the lake is gone, with

only a narrow stream left to show where it once had been.

Snow- In the Good Old Days

A couple of staff members were in the office in the Hanson House the other day, having fought their way in, in

spite of un-shoveled stairways and walks. They were there to do some necessary business, but with that taken care of, they were reluctant to face the elements again, and began to reminisce about the good old days and snow.

"What would you have done with this much snow when you were about ten years old?" asked one of them.

The answer was easy. Go sleigh riding down any nearby hill, or make snowmen in the front yard. Build snow forts in the back yard, and stock them with lots of snowballs to use against your next-door "enemy" friends.

There was a time when the City of Elizabeth used to close off a part of Wyoming Avenue in the Elmora section and use it just for sled-riding, but there was a much closer to home dead end street that we used. It had a thirty-foot drop and was rarely plowed until days after the snow fell, and every kid with a sled came from blocks around for an afternoon of fun.

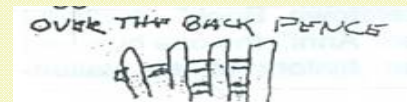
Fun, that is, until the old schoolmarm who lived at the top of the hill couldn't stand the noise any longer and called the cops, who sent a

man on a motorcycle. He was sympathetic, but orders were orders, and that was the end of sleigh-riding, that day.

Does anyone remember the toboggan chutes that the county set up on Galloping Hill Golf Course? These drew record crowds from miles around, and toboggans could be rented at the club house for fifty cents an hour.

Elevated launching ramps were set up nearby, and a couple of men helped load four riders aboard each sled. The rider in front had his feet tucked safely inside the curl of the toboggan, and the feet of the other three were tucked under the arms of the person in front. When all was ready, the pad was tilted, and the sled took off down the icy wooden chute, at a mile a minute speed.

The wooden chute was only a part of the run, and the toboggan continued with its load for several more hundred feet down the hill. Then it was time to get off and drag the sled back up to the club house and get in line for the next ride. It was fun, and the fifty cents was well-spent, but after several long walks back up the hill, most riders were quite willing to turn over the toboggan to the next renter.



Using some of the many pictures from our files, Bill Frolich has put together a new slide show about Old Elizabeth, as part of the 350th year celebration of that city's birthday.

The snows of January and February have made it difficult for members of the office staff to get to the Hanson House, but they keep trying