



UNION COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Executive Board Meeting

The Executive Board met on August 18 in the Hanson House at 2:00 pm where plans were made for the coming year. Among them were the dates of activities for that year, and a slate of officers for the election in October. Plans for our picnic on September 8 were finalized, and also arrangements were made for our meeting of October 6, to be held in the Reeves-Reed Arboretum at 165 Hobart Avenue in Summit, New Jersey. This is a rather unusual departure from our earlier planned schedule.

Our September 8th picnic will be held in the rear of the Hanson House at 2 pm. We hope for fair weather, but if it rains, we will move it indoors, but it will be held.

As usual, the Society will provide the hot dogs, hamburgers, and soda, with the members asked to bring other sort of picnic food. They are also invited to bring any guests if desired, as well as lawn chairs.

Any necessary Society business will be taken up at the picnic, but with as little interruption as possible. The new slate of officers for the coming year will be introduced here.

The Changing Scene

Elizabeth, New Jersey has been around for three hundred fifty-five years, and has seen many changes during those years. Only a very few of its original buildings still stand to remind us of where it all began, and even they have had changes. Boxwood Hall, the home of Elias Boudinot has lost all of its outbuildings and for many years was the Old Ladies Home. Nearby is the Bonnell House, built in 1682. Across the street is the Belcher-Ogden House the home of two early governors of New Jersey, and perhaps the oldest of such buildings in the state. Some slight distance from these mansions is the Old St. John's Parsonage, a part of which was built in 1697, as the home of Andrew Hamton and his wife Margaret.

Many church buildings have come and gone, with First Presbyterian Church on Broad Street being the third church on that site. Originally built in 1784, it replaced the one burned by the British in the American Revolution. It was rebuilt after a disastrous fire in 1946. The oldest original church in Elizabeth is the Second Presbyterian Church on East Jersey Street.

On the west side of this church once stood a large Victorian-style building of brick. It still exists, but not in its original location. In 1924 it was lifted off of its foundation and moved backward about nearly a hundred feet to where it stands today along side of the church. On the other side of the church once stood the home of Hannah Arnett, who talked the wavering men of the town to defy the British in 1776.

John Ogden's saw mill stood on Broad Street at the edge of the river for nearly two hundred years, surviving several changes of ownership, while across the street Carteret Arms, a one-time tavern and later home of the Elizabeth Public Library, was torn down in 1940, to be replaced by stores.

The Hersh Building that stands on Broad Street opposite West Grand Street used to be a tall, slim building of many stories with a pointed green-coppered roof, but one day it was cut down to only two stories.

Just out past East Broad Street, on Jefferson Avenue is Jefferson Park, which once had a beautiful fountain squirting water into the air, to fall back into the circular pool at its base. Gargoyles around the base also spit water into the pool.



Pictures From Our Files

Here we have a picture of Broad Street, Elizabeth, about 1887. It shows the First Presbyterian Church, its cemetery, and Parish Hall. To the left of the church is the old Union County Court House, and a horse-car rides the rails in the middle of the street.

This church is the third such building erected on this site, and replaces the one of 1724, burned by the British in 1780, during the Revolution. The first building was the meeting house built late in 1664 by the new owners and settlers of the land bought from the Indians on October 28, 1664.

Very little is known about this early meeting house, except that it was used for everything, including church services. However, much is known about its replacement of 1724. It was made of wood, 42 x 58 feet in size. It had a high steeple with a town clock, and both the sides and roof were covered with shingles. The cost for building this new structure was one hundred pounds,

to be paid after the work was completed.

The cemetery is one of the oldest in the country, and contains the graves of the settlers of Elizabeth as well as many patriots of the American Revolution.

Here is the grave of Moses Ogden, leader of the twelve sentries who alerted Elizabethtown of the British invasion of June 6, 1780. Here, also, is the grave of Hannah Caldwell, killed the next day, June 7, by a British soldier after the Battle of Connecticut Farms.

Here, also, is the grave of her husband, the Rev. James Caldwell, "fighting parson of the Presbyterian Church", murdered by James Morgan on the 24th of November, 1781.

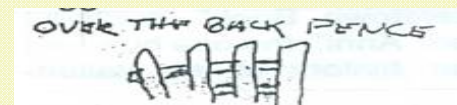
Memories

Here are more old memories of long ago in Elizabeth, New Jersey. How about the movie theaters that used to be busy every day and night in Elizabeth? There was the Ritz, the Regent, the Liberty and several other neighborhood houses, all of which, except the Ritz,

are no longer theaters. One night the Regent was showing "In Old Chicago", a popular film that literally brought down the house. A large part of the ceiling collapsed onto the floor, and the theater was closed until repairs could be made to the ceiling. Those were the days when 50 cents got you any seat in the first run houses, and most of the others charged a quarter. The Liberty even had a serial chapter, news reel, and three acts of vaudeville on Wednesday evening, all for that quarter.

Also missing are other once familiar scenes about the town. Gone is the junkman and his horse and wagon that used to travel the streets and announce his request for rags and junk by his loud voice. A similarly missing voice is that of the scissor-grinder who used his portable, foot-powered grinding wheel to sharpen knives, scissors, and other cutting tools for the housewife as he walked from door to door.

Gone are the whistles of the steamships in the Staten Island Sound. Now they use radio for their communication.



Bill Frolich says that he remembers when a gallon of brand-named gasoline could be bought for the magnificent sum of 8.9 cents. We will never find that again.