

BROADSIDE

April 1983

Welcome to BROADSIDE ...

...first issue of a newsletter published by the Historical Society of West Windsor! What is a BROADSIDE? The name originated with posters announcing events of interest to the public. We plan to continue in that tradition.

To some people history has the connotation of dusty books, stuffy people, and Ivory Tower thinking. But it's not. History is what happened yesterday, the day before, as far back as people can remember. We are living the history of tomorrow. Our aim is to set down the memories of yesterday, the events of today, and the plans for the future for those who will come after us.

In January 1983 we signed the documents forming the Historical Society of West Windsor. We have listed below some of the projects we have launched. Won't you join us in making them all a reality?

(1) ORAL HISTORIES -- The lives of our older residents tell of a different world, one without many of the comforts and conveniences we take for granted. We are in the process of taping the life stories of those of our older neighbors willing to allow us a glimpse into that past. If you are interested in taping, either as subject or interviewer, please telephone: Mary Schenck at 799-1278.

(2) HISTORY BOOKS -- Based on library research and oral histories, we will publish a series of books -- one on each of the five towns of West Windsor and others on special topics: transportation, the "Lost Towns" (e.g. Clarksville, Princeton Basin, Port Mercer, Van Hiseville or "Pig Town"), and the developments. Any information or photographs you would be willing to lend us would be greatly appreciated. Please phone: Joan Parry at 452-8598.

(3) DIRECTORY OF LANDMARK BUILDINGS -- Each building in the Township erected before 1910 will be photographed and a brief history included in the Directory. If there is sufficient interest, we will establish a Plaque Project like those of Cranbury and Hopewell. We will aid in placing qualified buildings on the National Register of Historic Places. If you are interested in working on this project, please telephone: Carol Silvester at 799-0444.

(4) NEWCOMER TOURS -- Since West Windsor doesn't have a Welcome Wagon or Newcomers Club, we plan to provide one via this project. Several times a year we will take newly arrived residents (and others who are interested) to see the major points of interest, historical and non, in West Windsor. There's also the possibility of bicycle tours covering the same subjects for those athletically inclined. Phone: Joan Parry at 452-8598 for further information.

(5) TOURS OF HISTORICAL SITES -- Since West Windsor is halfway between Philadelphia and New York City, there are many historic houses, museums and other places of interest (e.g. Winterthur, the blacksmith shop in Trenton, the Cloisters in New York City) within our immediate area. Day trips to such places will be offered several times a year. Joan Parry will be looking for suggestions and guides on such tours. If you are available, phone her at 452-8598.

(6) LOCAL HOUSE TOURS -- Our Holiday House Tour of Tamarack Hall was so successful we plan to do it again. If we can prevail upon owners of other unusual or historic West Windsor houses to invite in the public, these places will also be on the tour. Phone Kay Reed at 799-2400 if you would be willing to open your home to a tour or if you would like to work on this project.

(7) EXHIBITS -- We're preparing an exhibit showing the history of West Windsor from prehistoric times to the present. We already have some photos, old receipts, maps and memorabilia. Perhaps you have items in your attic or garage that you would be willing to donate or lend to our exhibit and reference library. If so, contact Ruth Strohl at 799-5944.

(8) RESTORATION/PRESERVATION OF HISTORIC HOUSES -- There are many buildings of historic interest in the township. For example, the John Rogers House, in Mercer County Park on South Post Rd., is the only building in West Windsor on the Register of Historic Places. We have met with the Parks Commission to explore restoration of this 1761 house. Phone Carol Silvester at 799-0444 if you are interested in working on this project.

(9) SPECIAL EXHIBITS -- We plan to put on special exhibits on specific topics such as "Farming before the Tractor," "Dolls and Dollhouses," and "Memories of World War II." Ruth Strohl at 799-5944 will be in charge of this project.

Now it's your turn! On the list above identify the activities that are of greatest interest to you and phone the Project Supervisor given at the end of the project. Or, if you have ideas for other projects, let us know by writing to the Historical Society of West Windsor, P.O. Box 38, Princeton Junction, N.J. 08550

An Interview With Georgiana Hauck

Miss Georgiana Hauck was Principal of the Penns Neck School for over 40 years. She retired in 1964 and now participates actively in gardening and the activities of the Senior Citizens Center.

The Penns Neck School was built in 1917, a twin to the Dutch Neck School. The building still stands at the corner of Alexander Road and Route One. At present it is occupied by business offices.

How did it happen that you became the principal of the Penns Neck School?

Mr. Arnold, the County Superintendent, was observing my class at the Alfred Reed School in Ewing Township. He asked me if I was interested in doing upper grade work. "We have a nice school and they have asked me to get them a principal, which would mean also teaching 7th and 8th Grades." I said, "It sounds very interesting, and I would very much like to deal with youngsters at that age."

Mr. Arnold recommended that I take half a day off and go out on the Johnson Trolley, switch to the "Dinky" that runs from Princeton and get off at Penns Neck. The school was just a short walk from the Penns Neck stop. I did just that and looked over the school. I told Mr. Arnold I was interested. He spoke to the Board of Education; they sent me a contract, and I became principal and taught 7th and 8th Grades.

How many students attended the school ... and how many teachers taught there?

I would guess about 130 students all told. There were just four teachers. At one time later, there were six.

Looking at a report card dated 1929, which you signed as principal, it seems that the subjects taught then were quite different from today. For example, what was Physiology?

Hygiene, health ... general cleanliness, how to take care of themselves properly, the need for regular bathing, not sneezing in someone's face, having a clean hankie, things like that.

Business Forms? What did that course cover?

It was everything: writing checks, writing business letters, such as letters of application if you were looking for a position. Of course, we did not have typing or things like that. We didn't have the equipment for it.

How about Civic Government?

It was called Civics also. Mainly, a discussion of local government; functions of local governments, police departments, etc.

In all subjects there was a State Examination in 8th Grade which had to be passed before pupils could enter high school.

There was much more of a ceremony made of graduation from 8th Grade in those days. Would you tell us about the commencement exercises you had at Penns Neck?

After 8th Grade the children left the district to go to high school in Princeton. We used to have an operetta as part of the commencement. We would use an already written operetta and add things to it. We had no special music teacher, but we had students with beautiful voices and we were able to use them. The commencement was held at what was then the Penns Neck Community Club on Route One (now business offices). We paraded the students, sets and costumes across Route One to the Club for rehearsals. I would go out into the road and stop the traffic (there was no traffic light). The drivers would laugh and stop while the students crossed Route One. The commencement was held in the evening and the Club auditorium was always filled to capacity.

The mothers and teachers made the costumes and we decorated the Club with ferns and flowers. The Cranstons had lovely pink roses that were in bloom at the time of commencement and we would gather the roses to make boutonnieres for each of the boys and bouquets for each of the girls.

It was a very festive occasion. I have seen many lovely commencements since, but they have not seemed as lovely as those.

What kind of careers were the children preparing for in those days? We're talking about pre-development West Windsor.

Most of the children at the time wanted to be farmers if their fathers had big farms. A lot of them wanted to go on to college. Some thought they wanted to be doctors. During the Depression girls thought of being nurses and boys thought of being doctors. They thought they would like to, but not really aiming toward them then. By the time I retired in 1964 development had begun, and we had more students whose families were not agriculture-oriented. Their fathers were businessmen or were teaching at the university. By then a large percentage of the students planned to go on to college.

What did you do to celebrate holidays, and were any holidays celebrated then that are no longer celebrated today?

For Valentine's Day the students would make Valentines. I made it my business to have a Valentine for each person so that no one would feel left out. I also stressed the fact that there were Valentines and "Valentines" and tried to make them feel how much nicer it was to use a nice Valentine instead of a nasty one.

At Christmastime we would set up winter scenes at the top of the blackboards. The children would make things to take home as presents. I remember we made napkin rings one year. I also suggested that the children set the table for their parents at Christmastime as a present.

Each Friday morning we had a general assembly in the auditorium with the usual "opening exercises" (the national anthem, flag salute, songs) and a short special program. Each week a different class gave the program so that all the children had the opportunity to perform, as well as be audience. Parents attended. The Christmas program was a combination of all classes, and parents joined in singing carols.

We didn't do much for May Day. As part of Drawing class, we would make little baskets to fill with flowers and hang on the doorways of friends and people who were ill.

How about field trips? Were any trips taken and to where?

Field trips were only to things within reasonable walking distance. I took the youngsters to see Mount's apple storage place. It was on Route One between Alexander and Meadow Roads. They had a big house and apple orchards. The specially built storage place kept apples at near freezing temperatures to keep them at their very best. Mr. Mount, who was president of the Board of Education at the time, gave me permission to take the children down to see it, and gave each one an apple.

I also used to take the youngsters down to the Basin (Princeton Basin) to a big old tree in a field. We measured the tree when we were doing arithmetic work on circumferences, diameters of circles, etc.

We usually had a picnic at the end of the year. Other than that there were no field trips.

Thank you, Miss Hauck! Any readers who would be willing to share their memories of "Days Gone By" should phone Mary Schenck at 799-1278 to arrange an interview.



Left to Right: Margaret Garland Alcorn, Myrtle Pittman, Georgiana Hauck, Celia Errickson

Nostalgia Corner

Do you know how Penn-Lyle Road got its name?

Did you ever have to wait while the canal bridge was open for boats at Port Mercer, Alexander St. or Washington Road? Do you remember the bridge tender's house at each of these places?

Do you remember Mr. Hey's general store where Peking Express is now?

If so, why not phone Mary Schenck at 799-1278 and share your memories with us. Both words and photos will be most welcome!

The Historical Society of West Windsor
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