



The Communiqué

The Historical Society of Plainfield
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Celebrating the 95th year of the Historical Society of Plainfield and the 270th year of the original farm house.

*In Memoriam Beloved Trustee
Mary "Molly" Banta
September 17, 1956 – February 27, 2016*

Memories of Molly

By Nancy A. Piwowar

I don't remember the exact day or year that Molly and I met. But I do know her Aunt Nora had a lot to do with us meeting. Her Aunt Nora (Monroe) and family belonged to St. Mary's Church, and my Mother and Aunt Nora were in the Altar Rosary Society. My first mail route took me along Evergreen Avenue where Aunt Nora lived, and we became great friends. I must have met Molly at Aunt Nora's.

Molly and I became fast friends. I didn't know her long when my Mother and I needed someone to stay at our house in 1992, when my oldest nephew was getting married in Pennsylvania. Molly was our house and pet sitter for the long weekend.

Molly and I had a lot in common: love of history, Irish heritage, a PANK (professional aunt no kids), love of Plainfield, and the list goes on.

Molly and I shared many stories, and she loved hearing about my adventures. After all my Irish relatives were gone, she was the road back to the old Irish times that I remembered when I was young. She was a link in the chain of my Irish heritage, and we told our stories like two Irish ladies, laughing all the way.

Molly and I took many day trips together – the farthest

was to Hyde Park, NY to the FDR Presidential Library many years ago. We did a lot of history trips and lectures – mostly in the search of good programs for the Historical Society. Many of the trips were done within the past few years.

Molly and I also were movie buddies. I have gone to the movies more with her than anyone. I always enjoyed her analysis at the end, and the best part was she was like me and would wait and watch all the credits to see where the movies were filmed. She took me to some pretty interesting movies and ones I would not have necessarily pick. As I recall the last one we saw together was "Jersey

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Memories from page 1

Boys.” I couldn’t believe she got me to go see “There will be Blood” with Daniel Dey Lewis, one of Molly’s favorite actors.

Molly was the one who really led me on the road to telling local history. As trustees of the HSP, we came together to tell Plainfield’s history. Many times she invited me into the high school to tell her students local history stories. She introduced me to Tiffany Corbett and her students. They helped me research the Veteran’s monument outside City Hall. Tiffany, Jeff, Paul, and Molly embraced me with invitations to give lectures to their students and instill pride of place in Plainfield. She also encouraged me to tell the students that I was a product of the Plainfield school system. They could not believe I went to the “Hub” aka

Hubbard. Molly and I had a plan for the future – we were going to write a book about US history and how Plainfield people had an impact on US events no matter the era. Molly, I promise I will write the book and it will be dedicated to you, but I will miss your insight and spunk to set me straight.

Molly, every time I step into the Drake House I see you and feel your spirit. We had some great times there, and we had some great Drake House times in your house while you were sitting in your chair. You wanted to resign, and we wouldn’t let you. You signed checks, helped me with many mailings, gave me endless advice, and one of the last things we did was look at a wonderful quilt that was donated to the HSP. I wanted to share the opening of the package with you, and it was such fun looking at a piece of history. Rest in Peace, my Dear Friend, Molly.



Rahway Cemetery and Preserving Cultural Memory

By Leann Manna

Officially established in 1741, the Rahway cemetery has witnessed American history and houses many of the people that had a hand in making it. However, not all of these people are the movers and shakers we read about in our history books. This begs the question: are they less important? What place do these individuals hold in history and more importantly why should we remember them? The answer lies in the concept of cultural memory. Cultural memory is what shapes a community or group. It influences our lives and how we interact with our history. The idea of cultural memory is very strong in old cemeteries such as the Rahway Cemetery. These are not the seemingly far-away figures of history like George Washington, Harriet Tubman, or FDR. These are ordinary people who lived in our towns maybe grew up on our street. Their stories are more poignant; we can connect with them and see how their stories contribute to the bigger picture of our history. However, if our cemeteries are not preserved, we will lose their stories and pieces of our history with them. Many of the stones in Rahway are unreadable, falling over, or destroyed.

Among the many people buried in Rahway cemetery is Abraham Clark, best known as one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, the document which essentially started the United States. His tombstone has been encased in bronze with a large monument ensuring its continued survival. However, also buried in the cemetery are seventy-one Revolutionary War soldiers. Many of their stones are completely unreadable or have fallen apart. Are these men any less important than Clark? Sure, they did not sign the Declaration of Independence, but they went out and fought for something they believed in. The Revolution, or any war, could not be won without people who were willing to fight. Now, we may never know who some of them were or what they accomplished.

Rahway Cemetery from page 3

An interesting story from the cemetery is that of Ambo, a slave who lived from 1747– 1847. She served the family of Abraham Terrill and outlived him, his children, and some of his grandchildren. When she died she was buried in the family plot and given a headstone. Most slaves of the time were not given a tombstone at all, and they certainly were not buried in family plots. Ambo's grave is in much better condition than the other one on the family plot, which is unreadable. People still stop by and pay their respects to Ambo by placing flowers and wreaths on her grave.

In the cemetery there are buried approximately 300 Civil War soldiers. Among the soldiers are twenty-nine African American soldiers, who were buried in the absolute back of the cemetery with only wooden crosses to mark their graves. It was not until the late 20th century that they would be given military headstones. In order to find the grave sites cemetery maps from the era had to be used. It is possible there are still forgotten soldiers buried in unmarked graves. There is little to no record of them, and we do not know much about these men as individuals, but their collective story speaks to the prejudice of the era.

The cemetery also houses The Unknown Woman, who was found murdered on March 27, 1837. It was never discovered who killed her or even who she was. Because of this, she became a phenomenon across the US and Europe. She was eventually buried in the cemetery, but away from the main populace since it was unknown if she was Christian or a prostitute.

There are many more fascinating stories to be discovered walking among the stones of the Rahway Cemetery. These stories speak to our nation's history, but also to our individual cultural history as citizens of what was once Elizabethtown. We know the stories I talked about and many others because their tombstones are still intact and readable. However, there are men and women whose stories have been lost to us. Their stones are destroyed and we may never know who they were, what they accomplished, or what contribution they made to history. It is for this reason, along with basic human decency, that we should strive to preserve our cemeteries and record their information before it is too late.

Cesar or Caesar
c. 1702 - February 7, 1806

Nathaniel Drake's father, Isaac, died in 1759. Upon his death, Cate, the female slave was granted her freedom. The three male slaves were granted their freedom after 10 years of additional service to the Drake Family. Provisions were made in Isaac's will for the estate to provide for the slaves after their manumission.

Cesar, the only male slave to remain with the Drakes after being granted his freedom, served with the Continental forces at the Post at Trenton, March 1, 1780. He was a teamster, and handled a four horse team. The Conductor of the Brigade was

William Davison, and the other teamsters were: Robert Bart, Rulif Covenhoven, Jacob Skillman, John Hubbert, Martin Moore, John Allen, Benjamin Gulish, and Joseph Vanpelt.

At the time of his service, Cesar was 78 years old. He lived to be 104, and is buried in Scotch Plains Baptist Church Cemetery. Nathaniel, who was a deacon of the church, is also buried there, along with Nathaniel's two wives and many family members.

Timeline of the Drake House

1743

Isaac Drake purchases the 111 acres that the house is to be built on from Judge Samuel Neville. Isaac, his sons Nathaniel, Isaac, and Samuel, and their slaves, Tone, Tom, and Caesar begin construction.

1746

Construction on the Drake House is complete. It is a one-and-a-half story, four-room farm house with a loft upstairs. Nathaniel moves in shortly after his 21st birthday.

1759

Isaac Drake dies and in his will frees his slave Cate. The other three slaves, Tom, Tone, and Cesar, are to be freed 10 years after his death.

1769

Tom, Tone, and Cesar are freed.

June 25, 1777

General George Washington holds a Council of War at the Drake House.

June 25–27, 1777

General George Washington meets with scouts and commands his troops from the Drake House. The Battle of Short Hills is fought.

May, 1788

Three of the Nathaniel Drake's sons, Cornelius, Abraham and Isaac, depart from New Jersey with their families and head to the western territory, eventually settling in Mays Lick, Kentucky.

September 22, 1864

Daniel Drake sells the house and 6.41 acres of land to wealthy New York businessman John S. Harberger for \$5,000. (Approximately \$76,923 today)

1865

John S. Harberger begins to modernize the house and adds a new second story with mansard roof and dormers, projecting bays and kitchen stairs and installs the main stairs.

1875

The tower is added and replaces the rear lean-to. The porte-cochere entrance and turret tower are added.

April 26, 1917

John S. Harberger's heirs sell the house to Rosa and Siegmund Frucht. During WWI, it was rumored the house was occupied by a group against the Allied cause, and much seditious literature was found when the house was raided. They were arrested and the house abandoned.

June 24, 1920

The house is bought by Bertram F. Tallamy, who conveys it to the West End Civic Association of Plainfield for \$15,000. (Approximately \$180,722.89 today)

1921

The first meeting of the Historical Society of Plainfield and North Plainfield is held and the Drake House becomes a museum for the citizens of Plainfield.

2002–2006

The Historical Society of Plainfield is able to start and complete a restoration plan for the house costing approximately \$1.2 million.

2014–2015

The Historical Society of Plainfield completes upgrades to security, fire alarm system, and exterior lighting.

2015

The Historical Society of Plainfield receives assistance from the City of Plainfield Shade Tree Commission for exterior landscaping.

Historical Society of Plainfield Welcomed Ohio Author, Ernie Wallace

On Thursday, February 25, 2016, the Historical Society of Plainfield hosted an open discussion with Ohio author, Ernie Wallace about the Early Scotch Plains and Plainfield Wagon Train Journey to settle the western frontier.

In May 1788, piloted by Captain Benjamin Stites Jr. of Scotch Plains, a wagon train of adventurous pioneers bid adieu to the West Fields of New Jersey and set out on a leap of faith for the unknown lands of the western frontier. The Stites, Drakes, Symmes, Denmans, Shotwells, Millses, and other men, women, and children who were bound together by religion and family, were swept west on the wave of patriotism and constitutional fervor that broke upon America with the end of the Revolution and the Great Debate over the new Constitution.

Among those pioneers were the three sons of Nathaniel Drake: Cornelius, Abraham, and Isaac. Isaac Drake's two-and-half year old son, Daniel Drake, traveled with the party for the sixty-four days of the journey. Daniel Drake later became a pioneering physician and prolific writer in Cincinnati.

Many years ago on the west side of Cincinnati, Ernie Wallace, BA, MBA (Xavier University), caught his school

bus every day on Boudinot Ave. It meant nothing to him then. While stationed near Colonial Williamsburg during a tour in the Navy, he gained a love of Revolutionary-era history. He minored in it in college, and has cultivated it as a hobby ever since. Ernie Wallace says: "Today, learning the stories behind the names on the roadsides and the towns is endlessly fascinating. The story of the settlement of Cincinnati is a story that deserves to be told in a way that is both enjoyable and edifying to the reader, in historical fiction. It is the format in which these unsung heroes, the tough, resourceful salt of the earth families seeking deliverance unto their own Garden of Eden, can really shine and helping history come alive."

Ernie Wallace came east to learn more about our history for his upcoming novel chronicling settlement of Cincinnati, Ohio, and share new perspectives on this little party that has contributed so much to the American story. The Historical Society of Plainfield and Ernie Wallace are exchanging information about the people from the Plainfield area who settled the western frontier. The Historical Society looks forward to the completion of the story and the publication of Ernie's book, and welcoming Ernie back for a book signing in the future.



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Drake House Tours for Grade Schools

By Gail Scott Bey

One of the best and longest-lasting services the Historical Society of Plainfield provides to the community is the guided grade school tour of the Drake House Museum. The tours give children historical context about what they learn in school, and after seeing and touching historical items, history becomes real for them.

Board members and volunteers conduct tours of the Drake House for first through fifth grade classes of Plainfield and sometimes North Plainfield school students. It is an amazing journey for the students to learn that the Drake House was originally a 4 room farm house built in 1746 before the Revolutionary War. The children learn about the colonial period in America's history by experiencing a colonial kitchen and bedroom. They learn about George Washington's visit to the Drake home and see the actual room where

he and his officers planned the Battle of Short Hills.

The children are also introduced to Civil War history through viewing artifacts and the paintings of Civil War hero and artist, Julian Scott. Students learn about the influences of the Victorian period as evidenced in the Library and Ball Room, both added on to the Drake House during the Victorian era.

Educational handouts are given to the children and teachers to enhance their educational visit, and we receive appreciation and thanks year after year from our schools. Often we receive children whose parents remember visiting the Drake House when the parent was in grade school. What a wonderful legacy, one the Historical Society of Plainfield hopes to continue to provide to our students, teachers and community for many more years to come.

The Legacy of Woodrow Wilson: Good and Bad

On Sunday, April 10, 2016, the Historical Society held a discussion on "The Legacy of Woodrow Wilson: Good and Bad," which was led by long-time Plainfield resident, Larry Bashe. Larry Bashe, a former Plainfield City Administrator and retired investment banker, presently serves as an Adjunct Professor of History at

Union County College in Cranford, and this semester he is also teaching a course at the Summit Community Center on "The History of US Presidential Elections." Larry Bashe serves on the Board of Trustees of the Historical Society of Plainfield.

The Historical Society of Plainfield received an operating support grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State. Funding has been made possible in part by the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of Department of State through a grant administered by the Union County Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs, Department of Parks and Recreation; the Garden State Historic Preservation Trust administered by the New Jersey Historic Trust/State of New Jersey; the Union County Open Space, Recreation and Historic Preservation Trust Fund; a HEART Grant from the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders; the City of Plainfield; the Plainfield Cultural and Heritage Commission; McCutchen Foundation; the Plainfield Foundation; the 1772 Foundation in cooperation with the New Jersey Historic Trust; the New Jersey Cultural Trust Fund; and the Gannett Foundation.

History in the Words of Student Visitors

Whenever school tours are given, the docents usually receive thank you notes and letters from the students. Here are some excerpts in their own words:

“Going to the Drake House was incredible! ...I also liked the orange sphere, witches ball, that kept the evil spirits away!” (M)

“It was a fun trip. It was extraordinary and amazing. I can’t wait to visit with my family next time.” (D. C.)

“The second place I liked inside the Drake House was the Victorian Library. I liked the 3D glasses.” (Y.F.)

“This trip made me picture myself in the 1700’s.” (K. C.)

“I also learned that George Washington visited there when he fought in the American Revolution. I was excited because I was stepping on top of the first President’s footsteps.” (C. M.)

“I was amazed at all the knowledge you put into my mind during my visit to the Drake House. It was amazing to be able to witness all of those details that described all of those objects from that period.” (M. C.)

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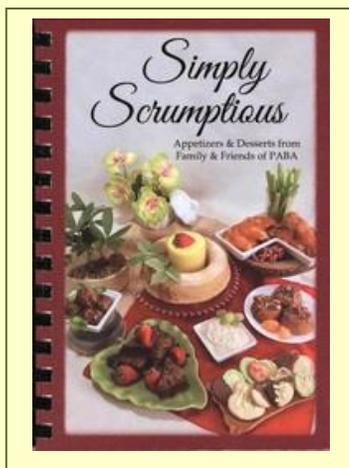
Please make checks payable to: **The Historical Society of Plainfield** and mail to: **602 West Front Street, Plainfield, NJ 07060-1004.** Membership donations are tax-deductible.

Calendar of Events:

Images of the Drake House curated by Leanne Manna will be on display in the second floor ballroom. Celebrate the 270th anniversary of the building of the Drake House.

- **Sunday, August 14, 2016** – “Preserving Your Family’s Treasures” lecture and workshop by Debra Schiff, Archivist, from 2–4PM.
- **Sunday, September 25, 2016** – 35th Annual Harvest Festival, County of Union, Department of Parks and Recreation at Watchung Reservation.
- **Saturday and Sunday, October 15 and 16, 2016** – County of Union – **Four Centuries in a Weekend** – “Colonial African–Americans’ Contributions to America” lecture by Nancy Piwowar and Leanne Manna at 2 PM.
- **Sunday, October 30, 2016** – **Local Cemetery Stories** at 2 PM.
- **Friday, December 9, 2016** – **Twentieth Annual Tree Lighting** at 6:30 PM.

For more details and up-to-date information, please visit our website at www.drakehouseplainfieldnj.org



Pick up your copy at the Drake House Museum for \$12. Please stop by Sundays between 2 PM – 4 PM



Pick up your Drake House Museum Limited Edition Ornament for \$10. Supplies are limited. Please stop by Sundays between 2 PM – 4 PM