



The Communiqué

The Historical Society of Plainfield
 Drake House Museum
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The Present Links the Past to the Future

Where Are the Interns Now???

Rakim Solomon recently completed his internship with the Society. He is a resident of Plainfield and a history major at Rutgers University. Rakim was just accepted at Drexel University, where he will be pursuing a law degree. He also volunteers with a children's baseball league in Plainfield. Rakim assisted with the Veterans' exhibit at the Plainfield Library of Drake House artifacts. He is currently working on the mega data for the clipping files of the Drake House Inventory Project files.

Nicole Torres is attending Graduate School for History in Newark. The Society had the privilege to serve as a reference for her application to the 9/11 Memorial Museum in NYC. She works as a docent for the 9/11 Memorial Museum.

Stefanie Carotenuto is currently at University of Colorado, Boulder, and studying for a degree in Secondary Education. Stef

came back for a short time to assist with school tours, and left her mark with the school children with the addition of crayons for the drawing activities.

Leanne Manna is an Honors History student at Kean University. She is currently a Trustee and Officer of the Historical Society. She also maintains the Drake House Museum website.

"It has been my pleasure and honor to work with these young scholars. They have all provided valuable service to the Society, and they have enriched the Society by their presence. On behalf of the Society, I extend sincere gratitude and best wishes for their future," said Nancy Piwowar, President of the Society.

Drake House Joins Other Organizations

As part of our outreach, the Historical Society joined various state-wide organizations which provide us with non-profit, advocacy information, and some promotion of the Drake House on their websites. Some of these organizations include:

- League of Historical Societies of New Jersey
- North Jersey American Revolution Round Table
- Crossroads of the American Revolution
- American Association for State and Local History
- Advocates for New Jersey History
- Center for Non-Profits
- Raritan-Millstone Heritage Alliance of New Jersey
- American Alliance of Museums
- CRAFTS of New Jersey

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President's Message – 2016 A Time of Great Sadness

By Nancy A. Piwowar

2016 was a difficult year for the Historical Society of Plainfield/Drake House Museum. It was full of sadness and loss. Just as the Society was coping with the passing of Mary "Molly" Banta, longtime Trustee and Officer, the Society suffered an unimaginable and tragic loss of Marcus Ellis who was a student at Kean University. Marcus had applied and was accepted as an intern for the Drake House Museum. Just before he was to start at the Museum, he was the victim of gun violence. He had aspirations of being a history professor, and I was delighted and honored that he chose the Drake House for an internship. Unfortunately, neither I nor the Board had the opportunity to get to know him better. His loss was devastating to Society.

Just as the Society was coping with the loss of Marcus, we heard the news of the passing of four former and longtime Officers and Trustees: Harry Ailster, Meg Kolaya, Terry Moroney, and Bernice Swain. Harry Ailster, former Trustee, was the Society's beloved piano and song leader for the Annual Tree Lighting. Meg Kolaya was a 24-year Board member and President of the Historical Society from 1987-1989, and was always engaged in entertaining history themed events. Bernice Swain had been a corresponding secretary for many years, and she always made sure the door was staffed on Sunday afternoons. Terry Moroney had been a Treasurer for the Society, and a generous donor to the Drake Archives Inventory Project. All of them were longtime members of the Society and great supporters of all programs and events. In addition, Lorraine Woodruff and Dorothe Pollard, who were longtime and dues paying members of the Society, passed away. The Society's current

Treasurer, Leanne Manna, lost her Father, Nicolas Manna in September, 2016. He was a great supporter of the Society and Museum. Nikki Butkiewicz, Trustee, lost her father, Geroge A. Shefton. While coping with these losses, I had a death in the family, John P. Stewart.

The Society's Office Administrator for over 10 years, Danielle Franklin, lost her brother, Josh Hartsfield, to gun violence on April 1, 2016. Another loss to the Society was the passing of Eric C. Watson, who was the Director of Plainfield Public Works and Urban Planning. Mr. Watson had a picture of the Drake House Museum posted in his office. He was a supporter of the Museum, and the go-to-guy to get things major things done on the property. He was always ready to lend a hand.

To the families of the deceased intern, Trustees, Officers, Members and stalwart Supporters of the Society and Museum, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, I extend heartfelt sympathy to the following families.

Marcus Ellis 1991-2016
 Harry Ailster 1931-2016
 Bernice Swain 1922-2016
 Margaret "Meg" Kolaya 1947-2016
 Eric C. Watson 1957-2016
 Lorraine Woodruff 1925-2016
 Nicolas A. Manna 1954-2016
 Theresa "Terry" Moroney 1944-2017
 Dorothe Pollard 1931 - 2017
 Josh Hartsfield 1985-2017
 John P. Stewart 1941 - 2017
 George A. Shefton 1943 - 2017



In his own words... **Marcus Ellis on his Drake House Internship Application**

"I would like to collect information from the Drake House and put them in chronological order. I would like to find out what went on during the times of the Drake Family and their efforts and effects on the local community. I want to figure out the importance of this landmark and the reasons why it exists still until the present day."

The Historical Society of Plainfield acknowledges Kean University for bestowing a posthumous degree to Marcus Ellis, who was in his final year of studies and in good standing at the university. The university also created the "Marcus Corey Eliis Prize for Excellence in Student Teaching."

Rest in Peace Marcus.

270/95 Appeal

Grant opportunities from the New Jersey Historical Commission have changed this year. It is anticipated that there will be cuts in funding. Therefore, we are making this “**270/95 Appeal**” to all our members, friends, and neighbors of the Historical Society of Plainfield/Drake House Museum. The original farm house is 270 years old, and the Historical Society is celebrating its 95th anniversary.

We rely on the generosity of individuals and businesses for support in order to fulfill our mission to provide local history services in our community. The assistance of community-minded individuals just like you enables us to preserve and restore the Drake House Museum and to serve our community each year by providing tours to local schools and community groups.

Our goal is for this **270/95 Appeal** is \$15,000. We hope that you will be able to make a contribution of \$270 or \$95 or \$365 (a dollar a day for the year.) The Drake House Museum is a very old house that is in constant need of repairs and maintenance. The funds raised will be used for educational programming, preservation and restoration, matching funds for grants, and general operating expenses.

Specifically, the Drake House is in need of the following repairs:

- Masonry mortar repairs to the window wells and exterior cellar doorway
- Exterior wood rot at some window sills and doors from the past severe winters
- Gutter repairs
- Air conditioning repairs

The Historical Society has applied for and received grant funding for some of these projects, but there is always a need for matching funds to access some of those funds from the funding sources.

Last fiscal year we had 18,892 total numbers of visitors (on-site, off-site, and virtual). These visitors came from 34 New Jersey municipalities, 6 states, and 1 foreign country. Drake descendants are finding their way to the Drake House Museum to walk in the footsteps of their relatives, and recently a direct descendent of General George Washington paid a visit to the Drake House Museum. The impact of local Plainfield area history is far and wide. Local history is public history about people, places, and events, offering a look back to learn from the past and help shape a better future.

Your donation is greatly appreciated. Remember that every donation makes a difference. You can also make your gift online: www.drakehouseplainfieldnj.org

Please come for a visit, or visit the Drake House Museum website for programming announcements.

Thank you in advance for your generous support!

Please make checks payable to The Historical Society of Plainfield. Your gifts may be tax deductible. Please consult your tax advisor for information. Historical Society of Plainfield is a 501 (c) (3). NJ Charities Registration #: CH0880800. NJ Charities Registration does not imply endorsement.

From our “Wish List,” a member and resident of Plainfield graciously donated a new laptop to the Historical Society of Plainfield for our archives inventory project. In addition to this donation, we have raised just over \$6,000.

Recent Inquiries

The Society through the years has received numerous inquiries from all over the country. Many of these inquiries come by way of the Drake House website and others come by telephone contact. Recent inquiries include:

- location of Ray's Sport Shop on Route 22 (now North Plainfield Nissan).
- request for photograph of Philip Breen 1833–1904, and his wife, Electa Moffitt Breen 1838–1893. Breen was a detective and chief of police in Plainfield. He left the city to become deputy warden of the county jail, under Mr. Cahill. He was also a state detective for New Jersey. His wife was a matron for the county jail in Plainfield.
- Information on Henry Hand who was from Plainfield. He and his brother William served together in the 11th New Jersey Volunteers during the Civil War.
- Gideon Allen former land owner in Scotch Plains.
- Drake Genealogy request and visit from a Drake Family descendant from Costa Rica and two of her friends.

Many of the inquiries come from people who are searching for ancestors who at one time lived in Plainfield or the area. Sometimes the information is found, and other times people are referred to other sources. These inquiries have led to monetary donations and membership donations.

Recent Additions to the Collection

Many former residents of Plainfield remember the Drake House by way of monetary donations and donations of artifacts large and small. The Society also receives Plainfield items from other Historical Societies and Museums.

The Collection Policy of the Museum is to accept items that are connected to Plainfield or owned by former Plainfield residents.

Recent additions include:

- Wood Brook Farm milk box.
- Wedding veil of Ethel Van Boskirk
- 1992 Sousa Band Centennial Concert Poster
- Milk bottles (4) from local Plainfield area dairies
- Glass bottle, Queen City Bottling Co., Plainfield, NJ
- Newspaper clippings from Monday Afternoon Club
- Container lid from Larry's Kosher Deli & Restaurant
- 1844 Engraving "Plainfield, View from Randolph Hill"
- Lampkin House files from the estate of Patricia Turner Kavanaugh
- Photo of a Victorian Lady from the G. W. Monfort Studio, Plainfield, NJ
- Two wedding photographs of Mrs. Henry Noss, and her 1933 wedding dress
- "History of Plainfield and North Plainfield" book compiled by F. T. Smiley, 1901
- "Henry Hand, A Life Shaped By the Civil War" book by Richard Weaver, family genealogy 2017
- Early 19th century Sheraton card table once owned by Mrs. Susan Tyler of 525 West 7th Street, Plainfield

The Society appreciates all the people who think of contacting the Museum before they decide to discard pieces of local history.

“A True Music Man”

IRVING K. RYDBERG

December 28, 1906 – January 11, 1993

By Vicky Griswold from interview with daughter Louise Rydberg Imperiale

Irving Rydberg first began selling sheet music in the middle of the Depression. Armed with twenty dollars and a dream, he slowly built up, piece by piece, a small stock of music, and was eventually able to establish credit with several music publishers, no mean feat during those lean years. Working out of a store on Central Avenue in Plainfield which he shared with Mr. Jay, a repairer of musical instruments, he was abruptly forced to sell the business when he was drafted to fight in World War II. It proved to be only a temporary setback.

Returning home from the war, he went to work at Gregory's Music Store in Plainfield, where one day he met a young woman who had come in to purchase the sheet music for the song "Plaisir d'Amour." She sang it for him, and thus began a forty year relationship with his wife, Agnes.

In 1951, Mr. Rydberg left Gregory's to fulfill a dream of owning his own music store. Initially located on West Second Street next to the bank, the store's first and most loyal customers were the same teachers who had taught him to play piano and wind instruments. Several years later the shop was moved – literally – to a location on North Avenue by members of his church in full chorus, pushing the piano and toting stacks of music through the streets of Plainfield.

A man of few words, Irving Rydberg was generous in spirit, and would always go the extra mile to ensure his customers' satisfaction. His music teachers were not just customers, they were friends. Eventually, the store

became known all over New Jersey for its large and diversified collection of sheet music, and in fact the New York Times mentioned it in an article as one of the few places in the metropolitan area where musicians could find such a variety of printed music. And he knew his stock! His ability to pluck the exact piece that a customer needed from a towering pile of sheet music was legendary, and he did it without fuss or fanfare.

He remained active as a musician, and for forty years was pianist and organist at the Gillette Chapel in Long Hill. He was also a member of the Chapel Band which played for church functions, including their yearly musical variety show, and at nursing homes. He also played piano with the band for weekly square dances at the Meyersville Grange, and eventually formed his own band, playing piano and saxophone for local affairs. He also taught piano at the South Plainfield Adult School.

Quite simply, Mr. Rydberg loved his work. His music was his life, his job was his joy. Through persistence and sheer challenging work, he could achieve his dream, and in the process, gave pleasure to countless numbers of people during his lifetime. For those of you who remember the many hours of happiness he got from playing the piano, we are sure he is now experiencing the same delight learning to play the harp up in heaven. We remember him with gratitude and appreciation.

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; a HEART Grant from the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders; the City of Plainfield; the Plainfield Cultural and Heritage Commission; McCutchen Foundation; and the Plainfield Foundation.

Spotlight on Newest Trustees

Vicky Griswold was born in Plainfield, and she has lived here my whole life except for 10 years when I was away at school. She goes on to reminisce as follows... My mother was also born here. Her parents moved here in 1908, and built their own house, where she was born. So, I naturally have an interest in local history. I grew up in a house that was built in the 1890's and now live in one that was built around the same time, in the Van Wyck Brooks Historic District.

I own a small business. The Plainfield Music Store, and building on North Avenue, one of the earliest commercial districts, that also dates to the turn of the century. My grandparents were active members of the Unitarian Church on Park Avenue, which was also built at the turn of the century. I am a member of the Plainfield Musical Club and the Watchung Book Club which was formed in the 1890s. I attended Evergreen School, Plainfield, and then the Hartridge School, which my mother and aunt also attended. Growing up in Plainfield, there were four movie theaters. My grandmother housed the famous violinist Fritz Kreisler when he came to play with the Plainfield Symphony Orchestra, the oldest community orchestra in the state.

Nikki Butkiewicz is very proud to join the Plainfield Historical Society as a board member. A Plainfield resident since 2010, Nikki has always been a fan of history. Her personal historical interests include the World War 2 home-front, colonial home-life, and historic food preparation and preservation. This year she is growing her own Victory Garden using heirloom seeds. Professionally, Nikki is a Director at a small consulting firm in New Providence, NJ.

Taraka Gilbert was born and raised in Plainfield, New Jersey. She works at the Plainfield Public Library in the Children's Room. She enjoys learning and researching local history. She fondly remembers the fourth-grade field trip taken to the Drake House so long ago. She is happy that it is still here for other fourth graders to visit and enjoy!

New Summer Intern – Stephanie

The Historical Society of Plainfield is pleased to welcome Stephanie Quartsin. She is currently in her final year at Rutgers University. She is studying biology and history, and she is very excited to be interning for such a historical monument, the Drake House Museum. She lives in Plainfield, and enjoys learning about the historical significance of the city where she lives. Ms. Quartsin says: "I am very happy to be working here for the summer as well as learning more historical events that involve the city of Plainfield."

2016–2017 Historical Society of Plainfield Board Members

Nancy Piwowar, Paul Pannone, Gail Soctt Bey, Sandy Gurshman, Leanne Manna, Larry Bashe, Nicole Butkiewicz, Liz D'Aversa, Taraka Gilbert, Vicky Giswold, Nancy Jordan, Andrea Kee, John Kozimbo, Diane Pender, Elizabeth Rifino, Angela Williams, Robert H. Wilson

Donations Needed for Twenty-first Annual Tree Lighting

The Historical Society of Plainfield invites one and all to the Twenty-first Annual Tree Lighting Ceremony on December 8, 2017, at 6:30 pm. This is a festive evening of caroling, gift giving, and refreshments. As always, a Gingerbread House will be awarded to a lucky family.

Santa will be making a surprise visit, with a gift for every child. In addition to the large Christmas tree in the ballroom, there will be three decorated theme trees in the period rooms of the Museum.

This program is free to the public.

The Historical Society of Plainfield welcomes any monetary donations and new toys. Please make check or money order payable to "Historical Society of Plainfield." New toys can be dropped off to the Drake House Museum; please call (908) 755-5831 to schedule a drop off time.

*Memberships go a long way to support the activities at the
Drake House Museum.*

Thank you for your continued support!

Membership Donation Form

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____ Phone _____

City, State, Zip _____ E-mail _____

- | | | | |
|--|----------|---------------------------------------|------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual | \$25.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Contributing | \$50.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family | \$35.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining | \$100.00 or more |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sr. Citizen | \$15.00 | <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate | \$100.00 or more |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Matching Fund | \$ _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime | \$500.00 |

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.

Past Programs – In Case You Missed It

The Historical Society of Plainfield/Drake House Museum hosted many programs since our last newsletter was published in June 2016; some were first time programs and some were annual traditions. Every program received wonderful feedback from those who attended.

During October, Leanne Manna and Nancy Piowar held a “chat and chew” titled “Halloween Adventures: Local Cemetery Stories.” There were so many stories told about locally deceased residents. A favorite among the crowd was the forgotten woman told by Nancy. Leanne spoke on how grave stones were made.

Four Centuries in a Weekend was held on October 15th and October 16th titled, “Colonial African-Americans’ Contributions to America” lecture by Nancy Piowar and Leanne Manna.

On Friday, December 9, 2016, the 20th Annual Tree Lighting was held. So many people attended that we had standing room only. During the annual tree lighting, participants sang songs and every child got a new toy. This year, the Historical Society received wonderful donations from volunteers, trustees, community members and the Student Government of Plainfield High School. The Student Government donated two children’s bikes which two lucky families were able to take home. Two do-it-yourself ginger bread houses were awarded in the hope that families spending quality time together.

On Sunday, March 26, 2017, in honor of Women’s History Month, the Historical Society of Plainfield held a lecture and book signing given by Carol Simon Levin, author and story teller. Levine portrayed Abigail Adams who famously wrote to her husband, John, asking the Continental Congress to “remember the ladies” when drafting laws for the new nation. First Lady Adams came to Plainfield in 1800, when she visited the troops at the Union Camp, and now her spirit made a return visit to Plainfield.

On Sunday, April 23, 2017, the Historical Society of Plainfield held a “Chat and Chew” and book signing with local author, Rikki Lyn Hauss. Her book, “The Duchess of South Somerville,” discussed the life of New Jersey icon Doris Duke and recounts the efforts of local citizen volunteers who tried to save Ms. Duke’s favorite residence in Hillsborough NJ from demolition. Ms. Doris Duke, who used her vast inheritance to contribute to society as an entrepreneur and philanthropist. Other members of DORIS (Demolition of the Residence is Senseless) were in attendance.



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



Calendar of Events:

- **Sunday, June 25, 2017, Annual Members' Meeting**, with special guest appearance by George and Martha Washington, starting at 1:30 PM.
- **Tuesday, July 4, 2017**, parade at 10:00 AM
- **Sunday, September 10, 2017**, Genealogy for Beginners, by Debra Schiff at 2 PM
- **Sunday, September 24, 2017 – 36th Annual Harvest Festival**, County of Union, Department of Parks and Recreation at Watchung Reservation.
- **Saturday, October 21, 2017**, County of Union – **Four Centuries in a Weekend – 10 AM – 5 PM** Exhibit on display titled “Plainfield during War World I and the Influenza Pandemic.”
- **Sunday, October 22, 2017 – County of Union – Four Centuries in a Weekend – Noon to 5 PM**, with a lecture by Leanne Meanna at 2 PM titled “How Civil War Veterans Influenced 20th Century America.”
- **Sunday, October 29, 2017**, Lecture by Nancy Piwowar titled “Plainfield and the Spanish Flu Pandemic”
- **Friday, December 8, 2017 – Twenty-first Annual Tree Lighting** at 6:30 PM.
- **Sunday, December 24, 2017 – Closed for Christmas Eve**
- **Sunday, December 31, 2017 – Closed for New Year's Eve**



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