



# *The Communiqué*

The Historical Society of Plainfield

Drake House Museum

602 West Front Street, Plainfield, NJ 07060

Tel: (908) 755-5831 Fax: (908) 755-0132

Web: [www.drakehouseplainfieldnj.org](http://www.drakehouseplainfieldnj.org)

Email: [drakehouseplainfieldnj@gmail.com](mailto:drakehouseplainfieldnj@gmail.com)

## Message from the President, Eloise Bryant Tinley

I began my education in Plainfield in the fifth grade at Hubbard School some thirty five years after the founding of the Historical Society of Plainfield and North Plainfield. However, despite my interest in history, it was not until I was elected to the Board of Trustees that I became aware of the Drake House Museum and its significance to the story of the City of Plainfield.

Perhaps by starting in the fifth grade, I missed the class tour to the House; or perhaps they were not giving tours in 1956. Nevertheless, I found it disturbing that, living in the community for well over thirty years, I knew very little about this historic house. I hope that each of you has taken the time to visit what we refer to as the “gem” on the West End of town. If you have, please come back again, and encourage others to come and bring their children, family members and out of town visitors and to become a member of the Society.

Learn about Nathaniel Drake’s family; General George Washington’s meeting with his officers prior to the Battle of the Short Hills; the Drake’s freed slave Caesar who was a wagoner with the Continental forces; the huge Civil War oil painting “The Death of General Sedgwick” by Julian Scott, a Civil War painter, and Medal of Honor recipient, who lived and died in Plainfield; the banker, John S. Harberger, who made many architectural changes reflective of the Victorian period, who donated money to build St. Mary’s Church, and whose daughter was married in the Drake House by the Archbishop of New York. These are just some of the pieces of history that you will learn during your visit and guided tour conducted by volunteer docents.

I have concluded my term as President of the Board of Trustees and am pleased to report that I am well versed and knowledgeable about the story of the Drake House and the history of the city, **BUT**, not as knowledgeable as my successor Nancy Piwowar. Many of you know Nancy or have seen her at meetings and affairs. She is a walking encyclopedia of facts, names, and dates about the house, the City of Plainfield and surrounding areas. She along with the other members of the Board of Trustees will work tirelessly to maintain the Drake House as a museum for the citizens of Plainfield and to fulfill the Society’s education mission.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all of those who served on the Board of Trustees during my tenure as President; community members, school teachers and community leaders who supported our efforts. And, a special thanks to our office manager, Danielle Franklin, for her commitment and dedication to me and the Board of Trustees.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Message from the President	1
Medal of Honor Recipients Connected to Drake House	2
Membership	3
Members’ Lunch	4
Fun Facts About Flags	4
Historical Society Gives NYVictorian Society Bus Tour	5
Past Events	5
New Volunteers and Staff	6
In the Footsteps of General George Washington	7
Plainfield History Hot Topic	7
Happy Retirement Robert	8

## Medal of Honor Recipients Connected to the Drake House

By Nancy Piwowar

James Madison Drake  
1837-1913

Julian Scott  
1846-1901

In November 2013 the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders and Union County Department of Veteran Affairs honored Union County's ten Medal of Honor recipients by erecting a memorial stone outside the Union County Courthouse, Elizabeth, NJ. Two of the ten recipients had a Plainfield connection, Julian Scott and James Madison Drake.

Julian Scott was born February 14, 1846, in Vermont, and became a Plainfield resident after the Civil War. He was a Civil War veteran, artist, and US government enumerator of Native Americans. He died in Plainfield on July 4, 1901, in the old Muhlenberg Hospital. He is buried in Hillside Cemetery. His monumental work, "Death of General Sedgwick," is on permanent exhibit at the Drake House Museum in the Harberger Library, and more can be learned about Julian Scott by visiting the Drake House Museum.

Julian Scott was a Drummer, Company E, 3<sup>rd</sup> Vermont Infantry, United States Army; and his Medal of Honor was issued February 1865 for actions at the Battle of Lee's Mills, Virginia.

James Madison Drake's story had been covered in a century of dust until an article appeared in a local newspaper which called for relatives of Union County's Medal of Honor recipients to make contact with the commemorative Medal of Honor committee.

Historical Society of Plainfield Trustee, Nancy Piwowar, saw the article, and wondered if James Madison Drake was a relative of the Drake House family. Using some of the Drake genealogy records, Ancestry.com, and internet websites, she discovered that James Madison Drake was a direct descendent of Nathaniel Drake. James

Madison Drake was the great-grandson of Nathaniel Drake. They never met. Nathaniel died in 1801, and James Madison was born in 1837.

James Madison Drake was born in Washington Valley, Somerset County, New Jersey on March 25, 1837. At that time Washington Valley was just over the first ridge of the Watchung Mountains, and his birth place was in what is now known as the Boro of Watchung.

He started his career in his father's printing office in Elizabeth at the age of six. In 1854, he began the Mercer "Standard" in Trenton, a large size literary paper, and later he started the "Evening Express," an afternoon paper. He wrote a campaign sheet during the political campaign of 1860. He was elected alderman of Trenton at the age of twenty-one, and was re-elected at the end of his term. He organized the American Hose Company in 1859.

When Fort Sumter fell, Drake organized a company of firemen, and went to Washington, D.C. He was appointed ensign of Third New Jersey Militia Regiment. He carried the regiment's colors and unfurled them on Virginia soil in 1861. In October 1861 Drake enlisted in Company K, Ninth New Jersey Volunteers (rifleman), and he was appointed a sergeant.

Later in June 1863, First-Sergeant Drake was appointed second lieutenant of Company D. On May 16, 1864, Lieutenant Drake was captured in the Battle of Drewry's Bluff. General Charles A. Heckman, Commander of the brigade, was also captured while making his way to Drake. Both were taken to Libby prison. When Grant's guns were here, many of the officers were escorted to the interior, Danville, then to Augusta, and then to Macon, Georgia. Drake assisted in the digging of tunnels as an escape plan. He was caught and then transferred to Savannah. He and others tried once again to dig tunnels for escape. The plan failed.

*Medal* from page 2

In September 1864 he was transferred to Charleston. On October 6, 1864, Drake and 600 other officers were put on a train headed for Columbia, South Carolina. Drake and three other officers (Captain Harry H. Todd, Eighth New Jersey; Captain J. E. Lewis, Eleventh Connecticut; and Captain Alfred Grant, Nineteenth Wisconsin) had devised a plan to escape from the train. When the train crossed the Congaree River, the four men jumped from the box car which was armed by seven Confederates, and they were free. They were free from their captors, but they were behind enemy lines, without guides, compass, cooking utensils, money, food, or warm clothing. Drake's escape and subsequent journey through the Carolinas and Tennessee was remarkable. During his journey he came upon slaves working the fields, and some supplied shelter and food along the way. At one point Confederate deserters located in the Blue Ridge Mountains also provided assistance. Drake walked for forty-nine days and barefooted in the snow over the Blue Ridge Mountains where he finally reached Union Lines at Knoxville, Tennessee.

Once he returned to his regiment he was commissioned captain. On April 13, 1865, he was mustered out at Greensboro, North Carolina. His Medal of Honor was issued March 3, 1873, "for extraordinary heroism on 6 May,

1864, while serving with Company D, 9<sup>th</sup> New Jersey Infantry, in action at Bermuda Hundred, Virginia." After the war Drake moved to Elizabeth, and was in the newspaper business. Later he was brevetted brigadier-general by the New Jersey Legislature. He also later commanded the Veteran Zouaves of Elizabeth, and with them he travelled across the US and through the southern States. The Zouaves attended the funeral of Julian Scott in 1901.

James Madison Drake wrote a book about his journey of escape from the Confederates. He also wrote a book about the Revolutionary War. He was instrumental in assisting the County of Union in identifying veterans' grave sites throughout the County.

It is unclear if James Madison Drake ever visited the Drake House because the Drake House was not owned by the Drakes in 1864, but in an old newspaper article when he discovered Caesar's grave at the Scotch Plains Baptist Church, he described the Drakes as a "prominent family from Westfield."

For more information about Julian Scott and James Madison Drake, please visit the Drake House Museum. For more information about Union County's Medal of Honor recipients go to: <http://www.ucnj.org/medal-of-honor-memorial/>

## Membership

The Historical Society of Plainfield thanks all of its members. Memberships, along with grants, enable the Historical Society to host free events and exhibits for the public. In order to keep events free, we need more active members. Please consider joining the Society or renewing your membership. It is critical that the Society continue to educate the people of Plainfield and surrounding areas about the history of Plainfield, the Drakes and New Jersey.

This year alone, the Drake House had visitors from Germany, and 53 New Jersey municipalities, and 7 states. We had several classes from seven different schools in Plainfield and the surrounding towns visit the museum. To schedule a group/school tour, please contact the Drake House Museum at 908-755-5831 or email [drakehousemuseumplainfieldnj@gmail.com](mailto:drakehousemuseumplainfieldnj@gmail.com).

## Members' Lunch

The Annual Members' Lunch was held on Sunday, June 22, 2014.

The Presentation of Slate is as follows:

Members of the Board of Trustees

Molly Banta 2014- 2017

Paul Pannone 2014 - 2017

Diane Pender 2014 - 2017

Robert H. Wilson 2014 - 2017

OFFICERS

PRESIDENT - NANCY PIWOWAR - 2014 - 2015

2<sup>nd</sup> VICE PRESIDENT- MOLLY BANTA 2014 - 2016

RECORDING SECRETARY - SANDY GURSHMAN - 2014 - 2016

TREASURER - CARLOS CARDOZO - 2014 - 2016

The resignations of Eloise Bryant-Tinley, President, and Robert L. Wilson, Treasurer, were accepted. During the annual meeting, several topics were discussed, including upcoming events, this year's budget, program highlights, tours, membership, visitation and the restoration and preservation of the Drake House Museum.

## Fun Facts About Flags

In honor of Memorial Day, Flag Day, Independence Day and Labor Day, here are some fun facts about the flag.

- The color of the flag are “white,” “Old Glory Red” and “Old Glory Blue”
- When folding the flag, there are 12 folds and each fold has a different meaning.
- There are 13 stripes which stand for the 13 original colonies.
- The 13 stars were placed in the blue square to represent a new Constellation when the United States gained its independence from Britain
- The original flag design was the same except from 1795 - 1818. During these years, there were 15 stripes. Thirteen were for the original colonies and the other two were for Kentucky and Vermont.
- In 1818 the permanent setting for the number of stripes was set at 13 and allowed new stars to be added each July 4 should a new state be admitted.
- The flag that inspired “The Star Spangled Banner” which flew at Ft. McHenry during War of 1812 contained 15 stars and 15 stripes. This flag is on permanent display at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History
- The 50-star pattern was created by a high school student from Ohio.

## Historical Society Gives NY Victorian Society Bus Tour

On May 17, 2014, the Historical Society of Plainfield welcomed Victorian Society New York Metropolitan Chapter on a tour of Plainfield. The two societies met at the Stage House restaurant in Scotch Plains for lunch. From there, the group boarded the bus and took a scenic route to the Drake House. During the scenic route, tour guide Nancy Piwowar pointed out many interesting places such as Muhlenberg Hospital, houses on Hillside that were designed by architect Evarts Tracy, Fitz-Randolph farm house on Randolph Road and St. Mary's Church. A few special requests were also granted. Danielle Franklin assisted Nancy throughout the tour. The last stop before the Drake House was a tour of Grace Episcopal Church. Special thanks to Robert L. Wilson for opening the church for the group. After the tour of the Drake House Museum, the group toured the Craig Mansion located on West 8<sup>th</sup> Street. A special thanks to John Stewart and his family for opening up their home for the group to tour. Light refreshments were served at the mansion.

## Past Events

Throughout this year, the Historical Society of Plainfield held some very interesting and yearly events. On October 5, 2013, the Historical Society set up a booth outside of City Hall during the 5k run/walk. People were able to stop by the booth during their leisure to pick up information regarding the Drake House Museum. The annual Four Centuries in a Weekend was held October 19 - 20, 2013. On October 27, 2013, the Historical Society hosted a special presentation "Ghosthunting in New Jersey and New York City" by author L'Aura Hladik. She spoke about the top haunted hot spots of NJ and NY from restaurants to museums and historic sites. On November 17, 2014, the Historical Society hosted a special presentation, "Revolutionary Tea" by Stacy Flora Roth from History on the Hoof.

During January and February, Indira Bailey hosted an art exhibit and gallery talk. She displayed many paintings and had a few on display for purchase. The Annual Tree Lighting was held on Friday, December 13, 2013. Each child took home a toy and Santa Claus made a guest appearance. A lucky guest won the ginger bread house. The Historical Society also coordinated with Crescent Concerts for a concert on May 18, 2014, titled "There's a Time for..."

### 2014-2015 Historical Society of Plainfield Board Members

Nancy Piwowar (President), Molly Banta (2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President), Sandy Gurshman (Recording Secretary), Carlos Cardozo (Treasurer), Sarah Chueng, , Liz D'Aversa, Andrea Kee, Paul Pannone, Diane Pender, Elizabeth Rifino, Gail Scott Bey, Robert H. Wilson

## New Volunteers and Staff

Within the past year, the Drake House of Plainfield has been visited by many families during open hours on Sundays. Two families have offered their support to the Drake House by enlisting their student/family members to volunteer at the House.

Brittany Manjarres from Dunellen has been coming every other Sunday to assist with activities. She is now working with the archivist documenting past exhibits. She has also helped with office activities.

Brando Galarza, who is going into the 12<sup>th</sup> grade at Plainfield High School, has been coming every weekend with his twin siblings Jade and Shey to volunteer at the Drake House Museum. As Brando says, "Helping the other residents and benefactors of the Drake House and, so far I have helped translate the Drake House Pamphlet from English to Spanish in order to widen our reach on the Plainfield community about Plainfield's rich culture." Brando is working with some of the members of the Drake House Museum on

projects for this summer and the upcoming school year.

These two student volunteers join the newly hired William (Bill) Dorward and Debra Schiff. Bill was hired to perform maintenance duties part time for the Drake House. In 2014 the Historical Society of Plainfield received a general operating support grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission, and a special project grant from the Union County Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs which provided the funding to hire a professional archivist/librarian consultant, Debra Schiff, to initiate the process of archiving and creating finding-aids for the paper records and ephemera collection so that these collections could be more readily accessed by historians, researchers and the general public. Funds from the grants will also be used to purchase the necessary archival supplies.

Danielle Franklin, for the last ten years, continues to support the Drake House in the function of office manager.

---

## 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 \$ _____ |  |

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.

## In the Footsteps of General George Washington

On Wednesday, June 25, 2014, from 6:30PM until 8:30PM, the Drake House Museum opened to commemorate General George Washington's visit to the Drake family farmhouse on June 25, 1777.

General George Washington consulted with his officers at the Drake House during the Battle of Short Hills, which was fought over the entire Plainfield area on June 25-27, 1777. Nathaniel Drake, his wife, Dorothy, and daughters Sarah and Phebe, were all patriots. The sons of the family, Abraham, Cornelius and Isaac, and son-in-law Benjamin Manning served in the Essex and Somerset Counties militia, and their freed slave, Caesar, was a wagoner with the Continental forces under Captain William Davison.

On exhibit was a copy of a Hessian map

from June 1777, showing the positions of Lord Stirling, Lord Cornwallis, and Major General William Howe obtained from the US Library of Congress digital collection. Copies of Caesar's Revolutionary War service record obtained from the David Library of the American Revolution and New Jersey State Archives was also be on display. Digital copies of orders and correspondence written by General Washington during June 1777, obtained from "The Papers of George Washington" online at The University of Virginia, were available for review.

All were welcome to walk in the footsteps of General George Washington, to look up at the ceiling in the period dining room and view the wooden beams that General Washington saw when he visited the Drake House 237 years ago.

## Plainfield History Hot Topic

The Historical Society of Plainfield receives many inquiries by way of telephone, mail, and internet. Recent Plainfield History Hot Topics include Julian Scott's painting "The Death of General Sedgwick," Temple Shalom, the Lord family, Victoria Hotel Fire, and the Plainfield Mining Company. Drake family genealogy questions are regular inquiries, and most recently Nathaniel Drake's son Cornelius' Revolutionary War record was the subject of inquiry.

These requests for information are given a preliminary answer by the Historical Society of Plainfield, then perhaps a referral to the local history department of the Plainfield Public Library or other New Jersey archive resources. Some of the requests are easy while others become history mysteries and subject to retention until the answer comes to light. Through the years there were many books written by local history enthusiasts, but most of the books have no indexes so the search for answers becomes a puzzle needed to be put together.

## Happy Retirement Robert!

The Historical Society of Plainfield, Rutgers University and Grace Episcopal Church has lost a gem due to retirement. Robert served on the Historical Society of Plainfield Board of Trustees as the treasurer for seven years. Robert worked at Rutgers University New Brunswick for 43 years as a mathematics professor. Robert joined Grace Episcopal Church in Plainfield 12 years ago. Robert came to the Historical Society through his membership in the church, where he was introduced to John Eklund, an active Historical Society Trustee until his untimely death.

Robert was an asset to the society. He prepared the yearly budget, kept track of

money spent for grants, and paid the monthly bills for Historical Society of Plainfield. Robert was a shy guy who didn't speak often, but when he did, everyone listened. He had a wonderful sense of humor.

Thank you Holly Algeo, from Grace Episcopal Church, for organizing a farewell dinner for the members of Grace Episcopal Church and the Historical Society of Plainfield Board of Trustees. The dinner was held on July 1, 2014, at the Carpaccio Restaurant, Middlesex, NJ. It was well attended.



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 Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs, 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, the City of Plainfield, the Plainfield Cultural and Heritage Commission, McCutchen Foundation, the Plainfield Foundation, the Union Foundation, EJ Grassmann Trust, the Pond Foundation, the 1772 Foundation in cooperation with the New Jersey Historic Trust and the New Jersey Cultural Trust Fund.