



The Communiqué

The Historical Society of Plainfield
Drake House Museum

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Ongoing Pandemic Issue

President's Message

By Nancy A. Piwowar

Over the past few months, the Historical Society of Plainfield/Drake House Museum had to pivot due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Museum has been closed since mid-March, programs postponed until further notice, school tours not available, Board meetings cancelled, and then resumed through the magic of the internet via Zoom. With limited access to the Museum, a re-organization of staff operations was required to preserve the collection from any unnecessary and potentially harmful cleaning and disinfecting of the Collection.

Through the talent of two Board of Trustees members, Leanne and Curtis, the Society was able to place online on the website a new tab called "At Home Learning." These initial activities for children are the ones that are usually handed out during school tours. The hope is to put more activities online in the future.

Leanne was able to place online under the "collections" tab, then "exhibits" tab, the exhibit of the "Plainfield During WW1 and the Influenza Pandemic." This exhibit is dedicated to the memory of the 45 soldiers and their Gold Star Families from Plainfield and the surrounding area who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country during WW1. Twenty-three of the soldiers succumbed to the ravages of the Influenza Pandemic. May they all rest in peace.

If you "click" on a panel, it will enlarge so that you may read it more carefully. Special thanks to the New Jersey Archives, Military and Wartime Records for the photographs, and to Ancestry.com, Fold3.com, and Newspapers.com. Funding for this exhibit was made possible by the Gannett Foundation.

In Memoriam:
Jean Mattson
Dan Damon
Victor D'Alessio
and the Plainfield
Covid-19 Casualties.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

President' Message	1
"Lost Fort of the Plainfields" Update	2
We Remember, Jean Mattson	2
Upcoming Events	3
Louis Chevrolet's Garage	3
We Remember, Dan Damon	4
We Remember, Victor D'Alessio	4
We Remember, Covid-19 Casualties	4

"Lost Fort of the Plainfield's" Update

Unfortunately, the lecture about the Lost Fort of the Plainfield that was scheduled for Sunday, April 19, 2020, has been postponed indefinitely. John Daniel is a descendant of the Vermeule Family of North Plainfield, and he travelled to the area last October for an event at the Vermeule Mansion and Fleetwood Camera Museum in North Plainfield.

Nancy Piwowar was invited by Friends of the Vermeule Mansion to meet Mr. Daniel in order to coordinate a plan to find the location of the Lost Fort of the Plainfields.

Subsequently, a number of other interested parties have volunteered to help, and plans were made to meet up in the spring and summer to form a separate group whose mission would be to find the Fort and educate people on its forgotten importance. Then the pandemic hit, and the plans were put on hold; however, the stay-at-home time has provided research time to scout the internet for online primary source documentation. It is a tedious endeavor, but information is being found which has been buried for years. Stay tuned for future updates.

We Remember **Jean Mattson** **1927-2020**

Jeanette "Jean" Squier Mattson, former Historical Society of Plainfield President and Trustee, passed away on May 1, 2020, at her beloved Plainfield home, which dates to 1842. She was 93 years old.

She was married to Norman "Moose" Mattson, and she was the mother of four children: Lois (husband Cory Storch), Kenneth, Joy, and Keith (wife Krisna Suryanata.) Her grandchildren are Alexa, Matthew, Nicholas, and Andrew.

Jean was a great supporter of the Drake House Museum throughout the years. She was proud of her Squier family ancestry who were early settlers of New Jersey in the 1600's. There are many fond memories of discussing Squier family genealogy while looking through local history books at the Drake House.

Jean was a masterful photographer, curator of many exhibits at the Drake House, and a former member of the Plainfield Cultural and Heritage Commission. She loved the arts, culture and heritage of Plainfield.

The Board of Trustees of the Historical Society of Plainfield extend to Jean's family our deepest sympathy. We thank C. DeWitt Peterson who would always bring Jean to Drake House programs. We thank Jean's family for their gracious generosity for memorial donations to the Drake House Museum. Jean, you will be missed, but your spirit lives on in the memories of the Drake House.

<https://higginsfuneralhome.com/tribute/details/3816/Jeanette-Mattson/obituary.html>

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 2019 HEART (History, Education, Arts Reaching Thousands) Grant from the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders; the City of Plainfield; the Plainfield Cultural and Heritage Commission; the Hyde and Watson Foundation; the McCutchen Foundation; and the Gannett Foundation.

Upcoming Events

The Historical Society of Plainfield will be coordinating efforts with the local history department of the Plainfield Public Library to provide virtual programs in the near future. Notices of scheduled programs will be sent out as soon as the schedule is finalized.

The year of 2020 is the centennial of Women's Suffrage. On March 28, 2020, at the Plainfield Public Library, Dr. Daisy Century was to give a passionate and inspiring portrayal of the life and legacy of "Sojourner Truth." Sojourner Truth began speaking out for women's suffrage in 1850. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic Dr. Century's program has been postponed until further notice.

Louis Chevrolet's Garage

By N. Piwowar

As you drive along Park Avenue, in the parking lot of Muhlenberg Hospital, you will see along the western boundary a series of garages. One in particular is more distinctive than the long standard multi-bay garage. It is a two-story, two-bay garage with a Dutch barn roof line, a chimney, and a second-floor exterior barn door for hoisting equipment. Ever wonder why this garage survived when all the houses around it were demolished for the Muhlenberg parking lot?

It was Louis Chevrolet's garage when he lived at 1232 Park Avenue. He and his brother, Gaston Chevrolet, lived in Plainfield from October 1916 until October 1919. Their youngest sister, Martha, lived in the Plainfield area until her death in 1974.

Louis Chevrolet was an inventor, race car driver, and a pioneer in the automotive field. He was a consulting engineer for the American Motors Corporation located at Grant Avenue and West Front Street. The passenger car, "American Motors Six," was manufactured there. The Chevrolet Brothers, who also designed the Frontenac car, would take their Frontenac for

practice runs down Johnston Drive, Watchung. Gaston died in a Frontenac at the Beverly Hills Speedway in a 1920 race car crash. Louis died in 1941 of natural causes. There is a Louis Chevrolet Memorial at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Hall of Fame Museum.

The house where Louis lived was demolished many years ago, but the garage in the rear of the property was spared. One can surmise the reason for the survival of this garage is that many Plainfielders knew that Louis Chevrolet once lived there. When Muhlenberg began acquiring the Park Avenue properties, the Board of Governors, the old guard (including former Mayor Leighton Calkins) who knew Louis Chevrolet, realized the importance of the garage, and never took it down. Muhlenberg used it for storage.

Louis Chevrolet's garage has survived for a long time, and now this area has been slated for redevelopment so the next time you drive along Park Avenue look to the west, and see a piece of Plainfield history before it is gone.

<https://plainfieldlibrarynj.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p17109coll12/id/206/rec/9>

We Remember**Dan Damon**

Dan Damon, long-time blogger of Plainfield Today, passed away May 29, 2020. For many years, Dan was a member and supporter of the Historical Society of Plainfield. He moved to Plainfield in 1983, and previously worked at the Plainfield Public Library and the City of Plainfield. He served as a member of last year's 150th Committee for the City of Plainfield. When he first moved to the City, he had started a Victorian catalogue business that included many interesting Victorian items. Dan's last Plainfield Today blog post was a tribute to his friend, Jean Mattson. Thanks for recording in your blog the memories of Plainfield, and rest in peace, Dan.

We Remember**Victor D'Alessio****1941-2020**

A member of the Historical Society of Plainfield sent a generous contribution in the memory of their neighbor, Victor D'Alessio, who was a 25-year resident of Plainfield. He was born in Woodbridge. He was a graduate of the University of Bridgeport, and was an Industrial Designer for over 40 years. He was a veteran of the U. S. Army serving in peacetime. His was predeceased by his wife, Georgie D'Alessio, and his parents, Carmen and Maria D'Alessio. He is survived by his sister, Albina D'Alessio, of Fords. Thank you for your service, and rest in peace, Victor.

We Remember
Covid-19 Casualties**2020**

The Historical Society of Plainfield is in the process of creating a Memorial Garden for the faithfully departed people of Plainfield who have succumbed to the Covid-19 virus. Many families were unable to commemorate their love ones with end of life services. Their love ones should not be forgotten even if their names are unknown. Plainfield at the time of this publication has lost 110 residents due to Covid-19,

The HSP recently put online an exhibit of the WW1 casualties and the Influenza pandemic of 1918, and 23 of the 45 Plainfield casualties succumbed to the ravages of influenza and related diseases. Those soldiers' stories are told in that exhibit.

The stories of the Covid-19 casualties need to be remembered too. Rest in Peace.