



# *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)

## Second Pandemic Issue

### President's Message

By Nancy A. Piwowar

#### Covid-19 Impact Update

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 because there is no room inside for six feet social distancing. Docents' and guests' safety are the utmost priority as well as the preservation of the artifacts from any unnecessary and potentially harmful cleaning and disinfecting of the Collection.

Emails, mail, and telephone inquiries are being answered on a regular basis. Private tours by appointment only have been conducted for Drake family ancestors who were travelling on a Covid-19 RV vacation from Maryland to Maine and for an automotive historian from Michigan who came to see the Chevrolet garage. Both of these private tours followed CDC guidelines.

Scheduled maintenance of HVAC, security, pest control, and other necessary work has taken

place following CDC guidelines.

Programs have been resumed in partnership with the Plainfield Public Library Local History Department via Zoom and other internet capable meeting platforms. These virtual programs have been successful with pre-registrations of 40 - 50 people.

Door, program, and research donations have taken a hit. If you are able, please consider making a donation to the Historical Society or the Library.

Your continued financial support of the Historical Society of Plainfield/Drake House Museum is much appreciated and essential at this time. Your support has provided equilibrium to the financial stability of the HSP, and words cannot express the gratitude that is felt for your contribution.

*In Memoriam:*  
*Frank D'Aversa*  
*Marianne Brady*  
*Charles McCutchen*  
*and the Plainfield*  
*Covid-19 Causalities.*

#### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

President's Message	1
We Remember, Frank D'Aversa	2
Upcoming Events	3
We Remember, Marianne Brady & Charles McCutchen	3
Eagle Scout Project	4
We Remember, Covid-19 Casualties	4
Remembering WWI Veterans and Obtaining Veteran's Grave Marker	5,6



*We Remember*

Francis (Frank) D'Aversa  
1934-2020

Francis (Frank) D'Aversa died Sunday morning, August 2, 2020, at Haven Hospice in JFK hospital. Frank, born March 14, 1934, was the son of Rosalino and Jennie D'Aversa, Sicilian immigrants. Frank and his younger brothers, Salvatore and Leonard, were raised with a multitude of cousins who were more like brothers and sisters. Frank served with the United States Army in occupied Germany during the Cold War (see his YouTube video: *Frank D'Aversa; War Stories*—and “like” it). He graduated from New York University thanks to his G.I. benefits.

Frank joined the New York City Department of Social Services in August of 1965 as a caseworker and met Elizabeth (Liz) Wake at his first training session. He and Liz were married on a hillside near Warwick, NY in June of 1971, thus adding to his cousins by blood and the heart. Frank and Liz purchased a cottage next to the Green Brook in Plainfield, NJ. During a massive flood, they were not discouraged, as the serenity of the setting provided a balance to the chaos at work, as they served a clientele made up of individuals struggling with homelessness, addiction, and the prison population, not to mention the challenging bureaucracy.

Frank believed in active citizen participation in democracy. He was an involved union member (SSEU and DC 37). He credited the G.I. benefits for his education and strongly believed in the advocacy of unions for the creation of a middle class. Frank was one of the original New Democrats for Plainfield and a vocal member and claimant to the privilege of the floor as a member of the Plainfield Democratic City Committee and the Union County Democratic Committee from 2003-2019. As a believer in civic responsibility, he also served as a member of the Green Brook Flood Commission and the Plainfield Citizens Budget Committee during the 1990s. He attended many City Council meetings.

Frank was a voracious reader, a connoisseur of fine bourbon, a lover of wolves, a wearer of many seasonal hats, a world traveler, a student of politics, and a true friend and neighbor. He was content with a glass of Wofford, a Spencer novel, and a purring cat on his lap. Frank approached his cancer diagnosis as he approached everything—firm in his belief that hard and honest work would result in a good end. He was positive that he would walk home with one of his walking sticks.

Frank is remembered by Liz, his wife of 49 years, a niece, Munia, a nephew, Mike (Diana), and his numerous loving family members. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Plainfield Symphony, the Plainfield Public Library, and Defenders of Wildlife. Liz hopes that we will achieve a safer new normal in 2021 and that travel will be easier so that friends and relatives can gather to remember and celebrate the life and death of a good man. Frank was a great friend of the HSP/Drake House Museum, and helped his wife, Liz, a Trustee, with many tasks to prepare for receptions, and he was always willing to offer advice. Frank, you are missed and rest in peace.

*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 New Jersey Cultural Trust Fund; 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; the Plainfield Foundation; and the Gannett Foundation.*



## Upcoming Events

The Historical Society of Plainfield is coordinating efforts with the Local History Department of the Plainfield Public Library to provide virtual programs. Notices of scheduled programs will be sent out in the mail and by email. Always check the Plainfield Public Library Local History Department's website for programs. The Library has all the registration links for virtual programming.

[http://www.plainfieldlibrary.info/Departments/LH/LH\\_main.html](http://www.plainfieldlibrary.info/Departments/LH/LH_main.html)

The year of 2020 is the centennial of Women's Suffrage. The "Sojourner Truth" program that was originally scheduled for March has been rescheduled for Saturday, November 7, 2020 at 10:30 AM. Sojourner Truth began speaking out for women's suffrage in 1850. Dr. Daisy Century will give a commanding performance of Ms. Truth, bringing to life a woman undeterred by incredible obstacles, a woman who mixed with the leading figures of the day, including Susan B. Anthony, Abraham Lincoln, and Ulysses S. Grant. This program is funded in part by a 2019 Union County HEART (History, Education, Arts Reaching Thousands) Grant from the Board of Chosen Freeholders.

### ***We Remember***

**Marianne Brady  
1936-2020**

Marianne Brady, of Center Valley, Pennsylvania passed away peacefully on Saturday, October 10, 2020, while in the care of St. Luke's Hospital, Fountain Hill, PA.

Marianne was born in Philadelphia, and was the daughter of the late John and Agnes (Montag) Painter. She was a longtime member of the Historical Society of Plainfield and served as a Trustee. She was the coordinator of the Junior Guides many years ago. Her daughter, Mara and her husband, Thomas, are former caretakers of the Drake House Museum. Her artwork and calligraphy are still a part of the Drake House educational materials that are given to students who visit the Museum.

She formerly lived on Madison Avenue, and was a parishioner of St. Mary's Church when she lived in Plainfield. She loved to paint and knit, and enjoyed a good glass of red wine with family and friends.

Marianne will be lovingly remembered by her daughters, Megan Wetzel and her husband, Joseph of Beverly Hills, CA., and Mara Miller and her husband, Thomas of Milford, NJ.; grandchildren, Jessica Wetzel and Liam Miller and her sister-in-law and friend, Sigrid Painter of San Rafael, CA. She was loved by many nieces and nephews and so many wonderful friends and former neighbors including the Stellas. She was preceded in death by her brothers, Louis and Jack Painter, and her former husband, Richard T. Brady. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to the American Cancer Society in memory of Marianne, who was a proud breast cancer survivor and participated in the Hellertown Relay for Life: American Cancer Society LV Unit, 3893 Adler Place, Bethlehem, PA., 18017. Rest in Peace, Marianne. You will be missed.

### ***We Remember***

**Charles McCutchen**

**He was a great benefactor of the Drake House Museum.  
Word was received of his passing at the time of the publication of this  
issue, and more will be written in the next issue.**

## Eagle Scout Project Thank You

The Historical Society is grateful to Troop 73 based at Holy Trinity in Westfield for their community service to the Drake House Museum. On Sunday, October 18, 2020, the fourth Eagle Scout project from members of Troop 73 was completed.

C. J. Estevez, who grew up in Plainfield and once served as an elf for a Drake House tree lighting event, came back to the Museum to do his Eagle Scout project. C.J., his family members, including: parents, Grandfather, aunts, uncles, and cousins; troop members and parents and leaders; fellow football team members, and friends helped to clean up the hill along Geraud Avenue. They landscaped it, planted flowers, and made an area for a bench so that people can overlook the hill and envision the western view that George Washington saw. General Washington travelled up the hill on the way to the Drake's house to meet with his officers during the Battle of Short Hills.

Some of C.J.'s family members travelled from far away to support his efforts. His aunt and uncle travelled from Maryland twice. One of his Aunts restored the Museum's sign.

As part of C.J. Estevez's Eagle Scout project, he invited his aunt and uncle and cousin's Lions Cubs troop from Princeton, NJ, to help with the creation of the Covid Memorial Garden. These very young children and their families' help prepared the area under the dogwood tree, and then they planted a flag for each Covid victim from Plainfield. At a later date, as part of a permanent garden, a daffodil bulb will be planted for each person lost.

C.J. started a gofundme page to help cover some of the costs of his project. He received donations of plants from Williams Nursery in Westfield, and rocks and plants from a Plainfield resident, Janet Dillon. To all who made C.J.'s project a success - a huge thank you. Thank you to Plainfield Department of Public Works for the removal of debris.

### *We Remember* Covid-19 Casualties 2020

The Historical Society of Plainfield has made progress in the creation of 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 117 residents due to Covid-19.

The stories of the Covid-19 casualties need to be remembered. If any family member or friend would like to leave an obituary, you are more than welcome to do so. You can leave a copy in the slot in the side door or submit online at the Drake House email at: [drakehouseplainfieldnj@gmail.com](mailto:drakehouseplainfieldnj@gmail.com) These stories will be then compiled into memorial books for the Library and Drake House archives. Rest in Peace.



## Remembering World War 1 Veterans and

## Obtaining a Veteran's Grave Marker

By Nancy Piwowar

In the last Communiqué, there was a mention of the online exhibit "Plainfield During WW1 and the Influenza Pandemic" which was put online by Trustee Leanne Manna. 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 of 1918. May they all rest in peace.

An article about this exhibit was written by "Tap Into Plainfield," the local neighborhood news online which included the name of one casualty, Martin Kane. Through computer algorithms, Martin Kane's name was elevated in the search engines of computers, and a relative of Martin Kane found the Society's exhibit online. Martin's family had heard stories about their uncle who was a casualty, but the details were sketchy and incomplete. Then Martin's great nephew and his wife made a trip to Plainfield from Philadelphia in search of the grave site of Martin Kane in St. Mary's Cemetery. They had no luck so they reached out through the Drake House Museum website, and sent an email to the info link on the website with the hopes of finding out more.

This family's inquiry was answered, and information was exchanged between the Society and the family, and the pieces of a puzzle over 100 years in the making were fitted together. The Society made calls to St. Mary's Church, and the staff were very helpful, and a tour of the Cemetery was taken. It was determined where Martin was buried, and there was no grave marker. Emails and telephone calls have now led to the possibility of obtaining a grave marker for Martin Kane 102 years after his death from the VA National Cemetery Administration. It will take time to process all the paperwork necessary, and obtain all the permissions needed. The Society is working with Martin's family who live in the US and Ireland, and with Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman's office to hopefully finally honor this Irish immigrant in a manner that he deserves. This is a developing story, and will be updated as details become available.

Martin Kane (Keane), whose name was changed when he arrived in the U.S. from Ireland in 1915. He obtained a job at the Spicer Manufacturing Company in South Plainfield. He left family behind in Ireland, and Martin still has relatives who live in Ireland. He was 20 years old when he immigrated from Kilkelly, Ireland. He was among the men drafted for WW1, and he entered the U.S. Guard in May, 1918. He died at Fort Hancock (Sandy Hook) on October 22, 1918. He died of pneumonia related to the 1918 Flu Pandemic. He had been dispatched along with other U.S. Coast Guardsmen to protect Sayreville after the Morgan Munitions explosion on October 4, 1918.

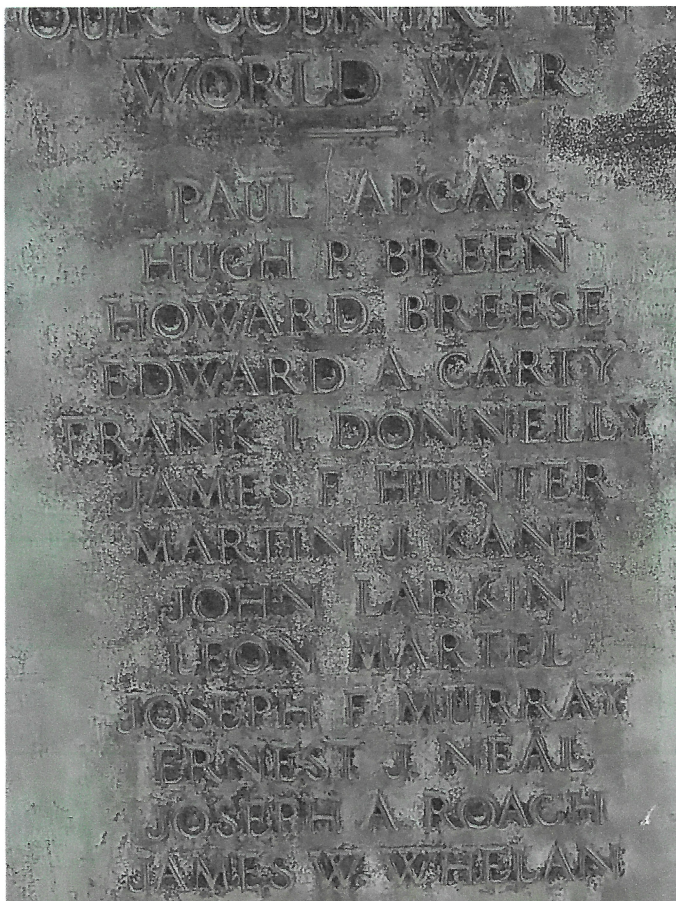
(continued page 6)



Remembering World War 1 Veterans  
and  
Obtaining a Veteran's Grave Marker  
(continued)

The exact number of casualties is still unknown, and some casualties were never identified. Fires burned for days. Food and water were scarce even the Guardsman did not have enough food or water. Martin was weakened from exposure, and became ill, and died. After his death his next of kin, his uncle Martin Regan, held a private service for Martin at his home on Spooner Avenue. There was a mass at St. Mary's, and Martin was buried in a Regan family plot at St. Mary's Cemetery. Within ten days of Martin's death, Martin Regan had to bury his seventeen- year old son who died from the flu.

Due to the ravages of the 1918 pandemic, his grave was left unmarked, and it was only recently that family members with the assistance of the Society and St. Mary's caretaker have determined that there was no grave marker for Martin Kane. No American flags on a Veteran's grave on Veterans' day. Martin's name was only discovered during the 2000 research for the City Hall Veterans' Monument. His name was found on the St. Mary's flagpole monument that the Church erected in 1932. Many of the Irish were poor, and the local parish church was the only place where some of the men's names were ever recorded.



Names on the St. Mary's Flagpole Monument dedicated on June 12, 1932. The ceremonies included a military Mass and parade attended by clergy, city officials, veteran and military organizations. The monument and tablet were erected to commemorate the thirteen young men of St. Mary's parish who gave their lives\ for their country in World War 1. The monument was a parish project and was financed with donations by individuals and organizations. It is located on the corner of West Sixth Street and Liberty Street.