



Communicator

Reporting on history-related resources, events & people in Camden County, NJ

Spring 2008

An Evening in the Projection Room

By Allen F. Hauss

Author of the 2006 book South Jersey Movie Houses

In the 1960's, videos and DVDs were dreams of the future. Movies were screened on 16- or 35mm film. The latest titles were on the 35mm standard of motion picture theatres, with 16mm reserved for older titles usually shown in schools, colleges, and on small cruise ships. The auditorium of Our Lady of Lourdes School of Nursing had both professional 35mm projection equipment and 16mm equipment for educational training films. Every six weeks they had Sunday evening screenings of major motion pictures for students and faculty. I was the projectionist for most of those screenings.

I arrived about a half hour before showtime to prepare the film for projection. 35mm films arrived wound on special tin shipping reels in heavy steel containers. Each reel ran about 18 minutes; for most features that meant six to eight reels. The first thing I had to do was inspect and hand-rewind all the film onto standard aluminum projection, or house, reels for the performance.

Projection rooms always had two machines for uninterrupted screening. After rewinding all the film, I would thread the first reel in the left (or #1) machine, then thread the next reel into the right (or #2) projector, using the tin shipping reels as take-up reels on each machine so I could quickly repack the film for return at the end of the show. Then it was time to check the carbon arc lamps. These were fitted with carbon rods that, when touched together, arced and burned to provide the whitest, brightest possible light for projection. My job was to adjust the rods to ensure adequate burn time for each film reel. Since the rods were consumed as the carbon arc burned for the length of each reel, they had to be adjusted or replaced after each reel was shown.

So as one reel neared the end, I'd light the arc lamp for the next reel -- all the while watching the screen for changeover cues on the upper right side of the screen. The first cue was the motor start cue for the second reel; the second, changeover cue alerted me to switch from one projector to the other. If I did my job right, most people never noticed all this switching between projectors, which occurred six or more times during every movie shown in every theatre in the world! Then, as each reel ended, I wrapped it with a paper band by title and reel designation and put it back into the original shipping container for return to the film exchange.

But what's a movie without sound? The auditorium was on the first floor and the projection room was on the second, with no quick, easy access from one to the other. So from time to time throughout the film's entire running time -- in between switching projectors, checking and replacing carbon rods, watching for changeover cues and repacking film reels -- I would poke my head out of one of the projection portholes, or windows, to try and judge sound levels.



Pictured is the Brenkert Projector recently donated to CCHS by Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center. The Projector is on exhibit in the Museum at the Camden County Historical Society. Also pictured, Sandy Levins, CCHS Board of Trustees Vice-President.

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The Camden County Historical Society

Our facilities include Pomona Hall, the 18-century mansion; 30,000-volume library; genealogical resource center; Boyer Auditorium; two-story Camden County museum; on-site and in-school education programs; local history demonstrations.

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JOIN US

Join the Camden County Historical Society and enjoy the benefits of our library, special events, subscription to "The Communicator" and much, much more!!

Annual membership dues are:

- * Individual \$25.00
- * Family \$35.00
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Go to our website, www.cchsnj.com or call the Society at (856)964-3333.

Deed project nears completion: Adds to CCHS's many resources for genealogy

By Jocelyn Koehler

Not long ago, someone discovered a treasure at the Historical Society. Twelve boxes of historical land deeds had been packed away in storage, only recently coming to light.

Camden County Historical Society's volunteers, Shirley Evans and Joan Rossler, have been working steadily for over six months, and we are pleased to report that the project is nearing completion. All the deeds have been examined and preserved according to archival standards.

The next step is to alphabetize and file each deed, so that researchers can access them. Our volunteers expect to complete this step by May. The final step will be developing an index so patrons may search by several different criteria.

This collection of deeds is just one of many resources that are available to genealogists and local historians interested in their own history or that of the county.

Land deeds can provide a wealth of information for people researching their family history. Not only does it list the buyer and seller. It may also give the names of neighbors (often family members); it will list the price and the condition of the property, and, if the sale is among family, it may also note relationships (such as a marriage) or show how names changed over the years. By adding deeds to your genealogical research, you may find out a lot more about your family than you ever suspected.

We are always adding new documents to our research library. If you have questions about what types of resources are available at CCHS, or if you want to know how to get started in finding your family history, please contact us. We'll be happy to help out.

Camden County Historical Society Receives Conservation Bookshelf
By Andrea Cakars

Treasured objects and artifacts held by CCHS will be preserved for future generations with help from the *IMLS Connecting to Collections Bookshelf*, a core set of conservation books, DVDs and online resources donated by the Institute of Museum and Library Science (IMLS), the primary source of federal funding for the nation's museums and libraries. IMLS and its cooperative, the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) will award a total of 2,000 free sets of the IMLS Bookshelf by the end of 2008.

The museum collections of the Camden County Historical Society contain textiles, clothing and accessories, furniture, tools and many other object types. Artifacts date from prehistory to the present with many relating to the colonial settlement of Camden County and the industrial history of the area. The *Connecting to Collections Bookshelf* will be a great resource for the ongoing care of these items which are such an important part of the region's cultural heritage.

CCHS is among the first to receive this essential set of resources based upon an application describing the needs and plans for care of its collections. The IMLS Bookshelf addresses such topics as the philosophy and ethics of collecting, collections management and planning, emergency preparedness and culturally specific conservation issues.

The IMLS Bookshelf is a crucial component of *Connecting to Collections: A Call to Action*, a conservation initiative that the Institute launched in 2006. IMLS began the initiative in response to a 2005 study by Heritage Preservation documenting the dire state of the nation's collections. The multi-faceted, multi-year initiative shines a nationwide spotlight on the needs of America's collections, especially those held by smaller institutions.

"Dreamland" Exhibit Packs Boyer Auditorium

By Hoag Levins

More than two hundred people attended the Feb. 2 opening night reception of the "Lullaby for Dreamland" photo exhibit at the Camden County Historical Society. The event, which featured two shows by the Bootsie Barnes Quintet, a soul food buffet prepared by Corinne Powers of Corinne's Place, and a display of a unique collection of photos from Lawnside's now-vanished musical clubs, drew one of the largest crowds to ever come to the Society.

Assembled for Black History Month, the program was a cooperative endeavor of the Camden County Historical Society, the Lawnside Historical Society and the Camden County Cultural and Heritage Commission. The photo exhibit spotlights musical artists from the Lawnside club scene that was a major east-coast music hub from the 1930s to the early 1970s. It is on loan from the Walt Whitman Arts Center in Camden, where it was originally curated by Stephen D. Winick of the Delaware Valley Folklife Center. The exhibit remained on display through April 10.

The food, along with the entertainment, was funded by the Camden County Board of Chosen Freeholders. The night's savory fare was prepared by Ms. Powers, who is nearly as famous as many of the musicians being celebrated by the evening's festivities. Her restaurant is renowned as a regional landmark. And the night's menu of traditional soul food chicken, ribs, greens, sweet potatoes, corn bread and all the fixings brought rave reviews from the crowd.

The night's band consisted of Bootsie Barnes and Sam Reed on saxophones, Don Wilson at the keyboard, Lee Smith on bass and Craig McGyver on drums. Barnes, Reed and Wilson are long-time veterans of the old Lawnside club scene where they frequently appeared as musicians as well as patrons.

Aside from regularly drawing patrons from as far away as New York, Baltimore and Washington, the Evesham Avenue strip of clubs served as a social hub of the region's community of professional musicians. "You could be in touch with so many musicians there," said Mr. Wilson. "Anybody who was somebody was there. A lot of them played the jazz clubs in Philadelphia, like the Blue Note or the Showboat. After their gigs were done for the night there, they came across the bridge to Lawnside to hang out and relax. It was a party scene that was always on." Mr. Wilson, who is 74, has been playing piano for 60 years.



Sitting amidst a gallery of photos from Lawnside's once-famous jazz club scene are saxophonists Bootsie Barnes (foreground) and Sam Reed. At left, Craig McGyver plays drums.

Sunday was the biggest day for the Lawnside clubs, remembered saxophonist Sam Reed. "The Blue Laws closed Philadelphia on Sunday, so everybody would be in Lawnside. It went on all day and way into the night. It was always crowded."

"The absolute peak of the whole thing was in the late 60s. It all started going downhill after that," said band leader Bootsie Barnes. Barnes, who was initially inspired by the music of Charlie Parker, has been playing sax since he was 19.

Some of the night's visitors literally helped to bring the pictures from the exhibit to life. When Dottie Smith, who appears in the photo of the Harlemaires that was the promotional icon of the Lullaby for Dreamland event, entered the auditorium, she was instantly recognized by many audience members. Invited to the microphone by Bootsie Barnes, she belted out a string of songs that brought the crowd to its feet in a standing ovation.

Another of the night's visitors pictured on the wall was Myrtle Young, who played Dreamland for years with her all-girl band – a rarity of the era. "But that's actually how I started, in an all-girl band," said Ms. Young, who began her musical career with the International Sweethearts of Rhythm. That big band was formed entirely of women in the 1940s when World War II took so many of the country's male musicians into military service.

"A lot of the environment that people remember as Dreamland was created by Jack and Emily Brady, who owned the club," she Ms. Young. "They were both such wonderful people. I remember when they died and another family member took over Dreamland, it was never the same. It was the beginning of the end. But I like to remember it how it was when that Lawnside strip of clubs was in full swing – there was no place quite like it anywhere else."

Walt Whitman: Rare editions of his work at the CCHS library

By Jocelyn Koehler

Walt Whitman is Camden's most famous literary citizen and many still visit his grave, located at Harleigh Cemetery, just down the street from the Historical Society.

CCHS is lucky to have many excellent resources for anyone interested in learning more about Whitman, both as a person and a poet. Over one hundred books in the library focus on Whitman, not to mention additional manuscripts and photos.

We have a number of biographies of Whitman, including seminal classics and more modern interpretations of his life. A tireless observer of everything around him, Whitman wrote essays and newspaper columns, and we have collections of both. For those interested in his poetry, the library holds copies of virtually all of his major and minor works, including *Leaves of Grass*, his best known collection.

Did you know that Whitman, never content to call a book "finished", insisted on several different editions of *Leaves of Grass*? He added and removed poems, and even made changes to individual lines, determined to bring each poem as close to perfection as he could. CCHS has over a dozen editions of this classic, including a rare leather-bound first edition.

Walt Whitman, more so than other poets, was deeply interested in place. He wrote about Camden and the region around it until his death in 1892. He involved himself in daily life here, shown by the book written by his colleagues shortly before his death: *Camden's Compliment to Walt Whitman*. Builders even carved a line of his poetry onto the new city hall: "I Dream'd in a dream I saw a city invincible". Whitman was thinking of Camden when he wrote that line in 1860, and it's a line to remember today.

Walt Whitman Sites in Camden County

Camden is the final resting place of Walt Whitman and where he spent the last 19 years of his life. There are several historic sites to visit in Camden County if you're looking for more Walt Whitman history.

Walt Whitman House

The Walt Whitman House, a National Historic Landmark, provides an intimate glimpse into the life of the poet.

Wednesdays—Saturdays

10:00am—4:00pm

Sundays 1:00pm—4:00pm

For further information:

(856)964-5383

Harleigh Cemetery

Whitman's final resting place is a large mausoleum built in Camden's Harleigh Cemetery, on a plot given to him in 1885.

For more information:

Harleigh Cemetery
1640 Haddon Avenue
Camden, NJ 08103
(856)963-3500

CCHS Museum Exhibits Walt Whitman Collection

By Andrea Cakars

The CCHS museum collections include a rich array of artifacts which illustrate the life and times of Walt Whitman in Camden County (1873-1892). Many of these items will be on display during the month of May to commemorate the 189th anniversary of his birth (he was born May 31st, 1819).

One-of-a-kind items at CCHS include two postcards sent from Whitman to his friend Tilghman Hiskey who worked on the Camden Ferries. The postcards were written during the summer of 1880 while Whitman was at Lake Huron, Canada. He had gone there to see his friend Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke whom he had first met in 1877 when Bucke paid Whitman a visit in Camden and the two had become close friends.

In the postcards, Whitman poetically evokes the scene, "Weather fine, country ditto – these noble waters, the lake & the St. Clair river dotted with steamers & sail craft, suit me first rate." He describes his plans for travel through the area including a visit to a Chippewa Indian village.

Other items in the exhibit include artifacts relating to the Camden-Philadelphia Ferries, maps of Camden in Whitman's day, and artifacts relating to Whitman's hero, Abraham Lincoln.

Walt Whitman and the Invincible City

By Sarah Hagarty

Walt Whitman found beauty in everyday America. Breaking from the literary conventions of his day, Whitman's focus and form took poetry in a new direction. In essence, Whitman created a new kind of poetry that expressed the extraordinary nature of everyday life. "Leaves of Grass" his epic work, embodies this philosophy by expressing the optimism of his day and the importance of the individual experience. Whitman, the controversial and unconventional poet, found acceptance and inspiration in Camden.

Whitman spent the last 19 years of his life in Camden. He first came to live in the city in 1873. He considered his residency in Camden a fortunate accident. Whitman initially moved to Camden to spend time with his dying mother. Upon her death, he remained in the home of his brother George where he recovered from a paralytic stroke he had suffered earlier that year. Whitman soon became part of the local scene, befriending local laborers at factories, rail yards and on the local ferries. Never one to let life pass him by, Whitman often rode the local ferries to Philadelphia and Cape May, sometimes all night long. He spent most of his time exploring and taking in his surroundings, activities he greatly enjoyed. He was happiest amongst the people and things that inspired him.

In 1848, Whitman purchased the only house he ever owned, 328 Mickle Street, at the time a diverse and lively neighborhood. Whitman thrived in the diversity offered by Camden and its surroundings, he credited the city with bringing him out of feeling like a "batter'd wreck'd old man." Whitman's time in Camden was one of the most successful and productive periods of his life. During this time, he published four new works and three edited editions of "Leaves of Grass." It was during this period Whitman truly found success as a poet. His talent and contributions to the literary world were becoming widely recognized in America and overseas. Prominent figures of the day including Charles Dickens, Oscar Wilde and Thomas Eakins often visited Whitman's Camden home.

Walt Whitman died on March 26, 1892; his viewing took place in the parlor of his Mickle Street house. Over 3,000 people came from far and wide to pay their respects.

Whitman was buried in Camden's Harleigh Cemetery, maintaining his connection to Camden. The words of Walt Whitman still grace Camden's City Hall:

I Dream'd in a dream, I saw a city invincible to the attacks of the whole of the rest
of the earth;
I dream'd that was the new City of Friends;
Nothing was greater there than the quality of robust love—it led the rest;
It was seen every hour in the actions of the men of that city,
And in all their looks and words.

Whitman has left his mark on the city that inspired his life and work. His words stand as a testament of his eternal hope and faith in Camden. Whitman's confidence in Camden and America remains relevant today and should not be forgotten.

Celebrate Walt Whitman's Birthday!

The Camden County Historical Society presents a special

Walt Whitman Exhibit

Items from the Society's Civil War collection will also be on display.

May 1, 2008—May 31, 2008

First editions and rare editions of Whitman's books, photos, biographies, autographs, prints and paintings.

Gone for a Soldier The Society's Civil War Collection

By Sandy Levins



Camden County might not be the first place that comes to mind when you think of the Civil War—especially with Gettysburg, Harpers Ferry and Antietam within a day's drive. But with gas prices soaring, you may want to check out the eclectic Civil War collection housed in the museum of the Camden County Historical Society before you hit the road.

From local recruitment posters and personal items the soldiers carried to a piece of one of the era's great ironclads and a Lincoln blood relic, it's all right here. And tying it all together, running like a common thread throughout the collection, is the Civil War era poetry of Camden's own Good Gray Poet, Walt Whitman.

The exhibit includes an impressive array of swords and sabres along with several items of Civil War clothing. There's a plaque from the USS New Ironsides, an ironclad warship that took part in the bombing of Fort Sumter. A Civil War bugle, fife and drum remind us of the role over 100,000 boys under the age of 15—and some as young as nine—played in both the Union and Confederate armies as musicians.

You'll learn about Joseph G. Strock, a local farmer whose letters home capture the horrors of war as we follow him through four years of service with the 10th New Jersey Volunteers to his 1865 return home to Winslow Township, where the Strock family put down roots and where Joseph Strock lived until his death in 1916.

Then there's the ghoulishly-curious Lincoln blood relic—a small strip of cloth, now discolored brown, believed to be a piece of the bedding Lincoln lay on after he was shot. Almost immediately after his death, pieces of bloody clothing, bedding, snips of hair and anything else associated with him were gathered up and distributed as tokens of respect for Lincoln and of honor for each recipient.

Putting the little snippet of cloth in context is a fragile broadside announcing "*Our American Cousin*"—not just the Ford's Theater production of the play, but the specific performance at which Lincoln was shot. When the theater owner learned President Lincoln would be attending, the printer added a last-minute sentence to a special edition for April 14 only: "This evening the performance will be honored by the presence of Abraham Lincoln." To this day, 143 years later, seeing the poster displayed next to that small piece of stained linen is eerily profound, reminding us of the deadliest war in American history—a war in which 3 million fought and over 600,000 paid the ultimate price for freedom.



A Real "Rosie the Riveter"

In March, when CCHS invited local women who had worked in World War II industries to come and tell their story as part of Women's History month, it never expected to get a real Rosie the Riveter. But in she walked: Rose Keene, now of Lindenwold. As a 16-year-old in 1942, she went to work at the U.S. Navy Yard in Philadelphia and was trained as both riveter and welder. Then living in Camden, she commuted every day by tugboat from National Park to the Navy Yard's Drydock number 4, where the battleship New Jersey was being built. Here, she's shown with Peggy Coleman, author of the book, "*Rosie The Riveter*," and speaker at the Society's Women's History Month event.



Tour Pomona Hall & The Camden County Museum

Tour **Pomona Hall**, the 18th century Cooper Family residence. Experience colonial family life and learn the importance of community and economics in the past and its relationship to the present.

In our two story **Camden County Museum** discover Camden's significant role in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. Exhibits emphasize RCA's impact on the entertainment industry and Camden's role in World War II ship building.

Group tours of Pomona Hall and the Camden County Museum can be scheduled on Wednesdays, Thursdays or Fridays throughout the year.

Individual and small group tours are available Thursdays and Sundays—no advance appointment needed. (Society members free; nonmembers—\$5.00 or combination ticket \$8.00; \$4.00 and \$6.00 for seniors and students.)

A tour of Pomona Hall and the Camden County Museum takes approximately 1 1/2-2 hours.

Fees: \$3.00 per student

Demonstrations:

Open Hearth Cooking: \$5.00 per student
(includes tour of Pomona Hall and Museum)

Spinning: \$25.00 per group

Reservations:

For further information and to schedule a tour or program please contact:

Camden County Historical Society

(856)964-3333

Email: cchsnj@verizon.net

Used & Rare Book Sale

The Camden County Historical Society
is holding a used and rare book sale.

Some items that will be available include: maps, presidential bios and memoirs,
South Jersey and Camden books including *Iron in the Pines* and *Prowell's* and
books on New York and New England's colonial histories.

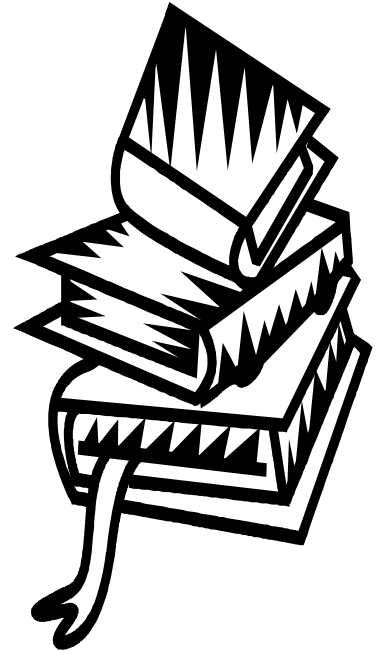
Friday, May 30, 2008
Sunday, June 1, 2008

10:00am—2:00pm

Camden County Historical Society
1900 Park Boulevard
Camden, NJ

(just behind Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center, off of Haddon Avenue)

Cash, check and credit card accepted for payment



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