



# Communicator

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

Winter 2008

## Cleaning Up Historic Butler Cemetery

Butler Cemetery, located at Ferry Avenue and Charles Street, is one of Camden's most important African-American historical sites. Established in the 1800s by Dempsey Daniel Butler, it is the resting place of local U.S. Colored Troop veterans of the Civil War as well as other African-Americans. Mr. Butler's tombstone is the centerpiece of the graveyard.

Born in Virginia in 1820, he arrived in Camden in the 1840s and opened a thriving grocery store on Kaighns Avenue. It became the central pillar of a business empire that ultimately made him the city's wealthiest black man. Along with creating the cemetery, he also endowed schools, hospitals and civil rights groups of the era.



Photo: Hoag Levins

Much like adjacent Evergreen Cemetery, Butler Cemetery became the victim of neglect and vandalism over the years but is being restored, little by little, by a volunteer group headed by Camden County Historical Society trustee Sovonne Ukam.

The group, with help from nearby schools, churches and businesses, works to clean up the site each year. This year's project included coaches and players from the Camden High School football team, St. Bartholomew Church Men's Club, the Romero Center of Social Justice and Willingboro Girl Scout Troop 6239.

Research documents relating to Dempsey Butler are available in the Camden County Historical Society research library. For more information on Dempsey Butler, request manuscript # 860, box 1, folders 1.5 and 1.6. The research library is open to the public on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday from 12:30–4:30 and every Sunday from 12:00–5:00.

### Still Family Books Available for Sale at CCHS

The Camden County Historical Society, in cooperation with the Still Family, is now offering for sale three books chronicling the lives of members of the Still Family.

***The Underground Railroad*** by William Still was originally published in 1872 and has been out of print for many years. This book presents firsthand accounts of slaves escaping north by way of the human support network known as the Underground Railroad. The narratives are documented by William Still, a son of emancipated slaves who helped guide fugitives to safety as an Underground Railroad "Conductor" based in Philadelphia. *The Underground Railroad* sells for \$42.25 plus shipping and handling.

***Early Recollections and Life of Dr. James Still*** has been reproduced from the original autobiography printed in 1877 by J.B. Lippincott, this facsimile edition contains an index and a historical introduction with a bill in Dr. Still's handwriting and an engraving of the office where this self-taught son of slaves dispensed his famous herb remedies. *Early Recollections and Life of Dr. James Still* sells for \$26.75 plus shipping and handling.

***The Kidnapped & Ransomed*** by Kate E.R. Pickard is the narrative of Peter and Vina Still after forty years of slavery. Introductions by Maxwell Whiteman and Nancy L. Grant. Originally published in 1856, *The Kidnapped & Ransomed* is the personal recollection of Peter Still, a black slave. *The Kidnapped & Ransomed* sells for \$16.05 plus shipping and handling.

The books are available for sale at the Camden County Historical Society, 1900 Park Boulevard, Camden, NJ. You can also order them by telephone and email. Cash, check and credit card are accepted for purchase. Contact the Society at (856) 964-3333; email cchsnj@verizon.net.

## Society Seeks Board Members

**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.

**President**

Richard Pillatt

**Executive Director**

Linda R. Gentry

**Administrative Assistant**

Amber Gordy

**Programs**

Sandy Levins

**Museum Director**

Andrea Cakars

**Museum Assistant**

Sarah Hagarty

**Library Director**

Jocelyn Koehler

**Education Director**

Deborah McCullough

**Web Editor:**

Hoag Levins

**Street Address:**

1900 Park Boulevard  
 Camden, NJ 08103

**Mailing Address:**

P.O. Box 378  
 Collingswood, NJ 08108

**Phone:** 856-964-3333

**Website:** www.cchsnj.com

**Email:** cchsnj@verizon.net

The Camden County Historical Society is currently seeking individuals interested in serving on the Society's Board of Trustees. Individuals with an interest in history, museums, libraries, nonprofit organizations, fundraising and/or education should consider becoming a board member. Whatever your talent might be, the Camden County Historical Society welcomes individuals who are interested and passionate about working with the Board of Trustees and helping the Society fulfill its mission and continue to grow.

**Board Member Position Description**

**Function:** Provide governance to the organization, represent it to the community and accept ultimate legal authority for it.

**Duties:**

- Attend all board and committee meetings and functions, and be prepared to participate.
- Stay informed about board and committee matters; review and comment on minutes and reports.
- Stay informed about the organization's mission, services, policies and programs.
- Keep up-to-date on developments in the organization's field.
- Follow developments in the community, economy, government, etc. that may affect the organization.
- Serve on committees and offer to take on special assignments.
- Make a personal financial contribution to the organization.
- Participate in organizational fundraising.
- Inform others about the organization.
- Get to know other members; build working relationships that contribute to consensus.
- Suggest nominees to the board who can make significant contributions to the work of the board and the organization.
- Follow conflict of interest and confidentiality policies.
- Assist the board in carrying out its fiduciary responsibilities such as reviewing the organization's annual financial statements
- Participate actively in the board's annual evaluation and planning efforts.

If you would like to be considered as a Board of Trustee member with the Camden County Historical Society you can obtain an application by calling the Society at (856)964-3333 or email cchsnj@verizon.net.

### 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
- \* Senior/Student         \$15.00

Go to our website, www.cchsnj.com or call the Society at (856)964-3333.

### Society Hours

**Research Library & Camden County Museum**  
**Wednesday, Thursday & Friday: 12:30–4:30**  
**Sunday: 12:00–5:00**  
 (Additional hours available by appointment)

**Pomona Hall**  
**Thursday: 12:30–3:30**  
**Sunday: 12:30–4:00**  
 (Additional hours available by appointment)

**Group tours of 10 or more, please call in advance to schedule date and time.**

**(856)964-3333**  
**cchsnj@verizon.net**  
**www.cchsnj.com**

## Explore Camden County's Black History

By Jocelyn Koehler

The Camden County Historical Society has a growing collection of resources on black history, from books to vital statistics to special museum exhibits.

Did you know that the Historical Society has numerous records chronicling the black experience in southern New Jersey? Our genealogy holdings include birth, marriage and death records for Camden County residents. Researchers may find their ancestors by looking through our cemetery records, for example Butler Cemetery, a significant historical site for Camden's African American history from the 1800s.

In addition to genealogical records, we also have biographies on prominent African Americans such as James Still, self-taught physician who lived in Camden County in the nineteenth century. Another Still family has a fascinating history in the area, as detailed in *Kidnapped and Ransomed: the Narrative of Peter and Vina Still after Forty Years of Slavery*. One of their sons, William Still, also wrote *The Underground Railroad*, a landmark work presenting firsthand accounts of slaves working their way north, as well as abolitionists who worked as underground railroad operatives.

Literature buffs can stop by and see the first edition of Phillis Wheatley's poems, published in 1786. Wheatley was a slave, taken from Senegal to Boston in 1761. Not only did she learn to read and write English in two years, she wrote poetry that is still studied today. Her book of poems was the first work ever to be published by an African American.

The Camden County Historical Society is planning to expand the African American history collection in the research library in 2008. In recent years, a number of excellent works have been published covering the black experience in New Jersey, including biographies and local histories. We will be adding titles throughout the year.

Going beyond the library, visitors can see more of Camden's black history at the upcoming exhibit "Lullaby for Dreamland." This photo exhibit tells an important part of the story of African American music in southern New Jersey. Dreamland, a jazz club in Lawnside, New Jersey, was a popular site for development of African American jazz musicians, as well as a key social and cultural site for the African American community between the 1930s and 1970s. Some of the musicians who played there included Jimmy Preston, Sarah Vaughan, Earl Curry and Dottie Smith. The stories of Dreamland will be told through pictures and sound, bringing Dreamland to life again. This exhibit will be opening on February 2, 2008. (see related story on page four of this publication.)

The Camden County Historical Library includes additional research documents and materials related to African American history. The following is a partial listing of resources available in the research library at the Camden County Historical Society:

- ***The Education of Blacks in New Jersey, 1900-1930: An Exploration in Oral History*** by Wynette Devore
- ***Institutional Development in the Black Community of Atlantic City, New Jersey, 1850-1930***
- ***Making Their Own Way: Black Social and Institutional Life in Camden, 1860-1920*** by Spencer Crew
- ***The Strange Career of Race Relations in New Jersey History*** by Clement Price
- ***Afro-Americans and the Constitution: A Contradictory but Evolutionary Relationship*** by Dr. Herman D. James
- **Negro leagues**
- ***The Attitude of the Society of Friends towards Slavery*** By William A. Cooper
- **AME Church, 3rd & Spruce**  
Epiphany Evangelical Lutheran Church, 7th and Market  
Trinity German Evangelical Lutheran Church, Stevens Street  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Kaighn and Princess Avenue  
Historical church records, part of WPA Project, prepared in 1936 by Philip H. Barnes.
- **Black Heritage Recognition Day** Proclamation signed by Melvin R. Primus, the mayor of Camden, February 11, 1984.
- **Cases Adjudged in the Supreme Court of New Jersey Relative to the Manumission of Negroes and others holden in bondage.** Burlington, Printed for the New Jersey Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, 1794. Softcover, 32 pp. (fragile) (Formerly cataloged in Book Collection, NG7A NJSAS).

Books, maps, genealogies, photographs and much, much more are available.

# Lullaby for Dreamland

By Sandy Levins

For most people, East Evesham Road, just off the White Horse Pike and Charleston Avenue, is nothing more than a way to get to Lion's Head Plaza, the Ashland PATCO station or the Echelon Mall. But for locals of a certain age, that stretch of road is rich with memories. Summer nights redolent with sweet-tangy barbeque smelling of home; swimming, boating, lazy picnics in the park; and music – memorable music by some of the greatest black entertainers of the day in a place called the Dreamland Cafe.

From the 1930s to the early 1970s, East Evesham Road in Lawnside was a weekend party mecca. Philadelphians crossed the river to enjoy New Jersey's more liberal liquor laws, while Lawnside's location, within driving distance of New York City, attracted entertainers who drew busloads of tourists from as far away as Virginia and the Carolinas. For almost half a century Dreamland and its neighbors – the Cotton Club, Wilcox's Cafe, the Whippoorwill Club and Loretta's Hi-Hat – were places where African Americans could dress up, enjoy fine dining, kick up their heels and kick back in style. But it wasn't always so.

In the 1840s, before America's Civil War, slavery was at its height. New Orleans was home to the country's largest slave market while, down south, in Mississippi and South Carolina, census figures showed slaves outnumbering free people.

But up north two Haddonfield abolitionists, Ralph Smith and William Watson, had purchased and surveyed a small patch of land roughly two miles square, with building lots to be sold to "colored" descendants of Africans and people of mixed blood. They called their community Free Haven. It would later be known as Snow Hill before taking its present-day name, Lawnside. Long an important center for black culture, Lawnside is New Jersey's oldest incorporated African American township and the site of the Peter Mott House, a station on the Underground Railroad.

In the early 1900s, though, segregation was still the law of the land. African Americans had few choices when it came to fine places to socialize and enjoy top-rated entertainment. A small group of Lawnside entrepreneurs, sensing they were in the right place at the right time, commercialized a dusty, unpaved strip of land along Evesham Road, just off the White Horse Pike. The area became known as Lawnside Park, boasting a lake and a boathouse; two swimming pools; an amusement park complete with its own Ferris wheel, as well as caterers, hotels and restaurants.

At the heart of it all sat the area's first nightclub – the Dreamland Cafe, founded by Mr. Jack Brady, and known for its food, drink and, above all, its music. It gave African American audiences the best of both worlds: barbeque pits and food reminiscent of their rural homes in the south, offset with lively jazz music to equal that found in the country's most urban settings.



Myrtle Young and her Rays were regulars along the Lawnside stripe. Left to right: Hettie Smithy, now a politician in Buffalo, New York; Willene Barton, who still performs in New York; Gloria Coleman, wife of George Coleman, saxophone player with the Lionel Hampton Band; and Myrtle Young.



During the 1940s and 50s, eastern themes and motifs were popular in the Black music scene. Here, Skippy Williams performs as "Sheik"

Although Dreamland hit its stride in the 1930s and 1940s, it remained *the* place to see and be seen well into the 1970s. Nat King Cole is said to have performed there, as well as Ella Fitzgerald; "Sassy" Sarah Vaughn; Sara Dean, who sang with the Louis Armstrong Orchestra; and actress/comedienne LaWanda Page, perhaps best-known for her portrayal of feisty "Aunt Esther" in Redd Foxx's *Sanford & Son*. Heavyweight boxers Joe Louis and Jersey Joe Walcott were frequent visitors. And some of the icons of Philadelphia's jazz scene made it their regular hangout.

Eventually, as segregation gave way to the Civil Rights Movement and the Jim Crow "whites-only" laws receded into history, local entertainment meccas like Dreamland began to suffer. Lawnside's hot spots cooled and eventually fell victim to the glamour, glitz and world-class talent Atlantic City's neon palaces offered in the late 1970s.

The Dreamland Cafe, like its neighbors, went into decline. Its first owners, Jack and Emily Brady, sold the club in the 1960s. Its final owner was Mr. Liberty Hodges, one-time owner of the Whippoorwill Club. But his plans to reopen Dreamland, bring back the entertainment and rekindle the memories foundered when he was unable to secure funding. The Dreamland Cafe was demolished in the summer of 1995.

By the summer of 1999 Evesham Road's last barbeque joint, Hilly's Place, had closed its doors for good. The little shanty with the sign reading "Willie Wilder, the Little Boy from Alabama," touting frog legs as its specialty, was long gone. Even the dining room and open-pit cooking area of Gerry's Family Barbeque – once famous for greeting diners with its pig's head painted on the cement porch – had become a thing of the past.

But if you drive down that little stretch of road today, you'll find evidence of the entrepreneurial spirit that gave rise to Lawnside Park and hot spots like the Dreamland Cafe. For where they once stood – where, for almost half a century, African American people came from miles around to forget their troubles and relax for an evening – land has been cleared and signs promising new housing at "Somerdale Condominiums" and "The Woods at River Run ... Starting in the \$400,000s" have popped up. The only hint of the fabled past when home-grown barbeque had mouths watering for miles around? A weather-worn sign for the Snow Hill Lounge, serving "Jamaican-Style Soul Food."

The Camden County Historical Society, in partnership with the  
Camden County Cultural & Heritage Commission and Lawnside Historical Society

presents

## ***Lullaby for Dreamland***

The Camden County Historical Society invites you to attend a photo exhibit focusing on the historic jazz venue, from February through April.

A collection of 40 framed photos from the 1940s, the exhibit mixes candid shots of club patrons with publicity shots of jazz and blues artists of the era.

***An opening reception will be held at the Camden County Historical Society.***

Live entertainment provided by original Dreamland artists.

**Date: Saturday, February 2, 2008**

**Time: 7:00pm–10:00pm**

**Address: 1900 Park Boulevard, Camden, NJ**

**The reception and exhibit are open to the public and free of charge.**

For more information, please call the Society at (856)964-3333, email, [cchsnj@verizon.net](mailto:cchsnj@verizon.net) or visit us online at [www.cchsnj.com](http://www.cchsnj.com)

## Calling All Rosies!

Were you one of the millions of women who served your country in a civilian or defense position between 1942 and 1945? Are you the child or grandchild of a local "Rosie the Riveter"? If so, the Camden County Historical Society wants to hear from you.



On Sunday afternoon, March 9th, the Society celebrates Women's History Month with award-winning author Penny Colman as she presents "*Rosie the Riveter: Women Working on the Homefront in World War II.*"

As men fought on the battlefronts of World War II from 1942 to 1945, over 18 million women walked out of their kitchens and into America's workforce to fill the civilian and defense positions that fueled a wartime economy. They were told they could do anything ... and they did.

We're looking for local Rosies and their families to share their stories with us on March 9th as we salute those women who not only changed the face of America's workplace, but helped change attitudes about women's place in society. Please call the Society at (856) 964-3333 with your information.

### CCHS Welcome New Staff Member



CCHS is very pleased to introduce the newest addition to our staff, Sarah Hagarty. Sarah was hired as the Museum Assistant and her responsibilities include providing tours for visitors and school groups, cataloging and inventorying collections, upkeep and maintenance of Pomona Hall and the Camden County Museum and exhibit research. Sarah is currently completing her master's degree in Museum Communication from the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. Sarah's work experience includes work with the National Park Service, the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Fairmount Park Historic Preservation Trust, Mutter Museum, Jekyll Island Museum and the Erie "Experience" Children's Museum.

### Conservation Center Program

The Camden County Historical Society participated in the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifact's (CCAHA) Basic Stewardship Program funded by the William Penn Foundation. The Conservation Center Program provided the services of their staff to perform a preservation needs assessment of Society collections and also enabled CCHS staff to attend workshops free or at a reduced cost. The Basic Stewardship Program was provided at no cost to the Society. The Society has received acceptance to participate in the Advanced Stewardship Program for 2008, also funded by the William Penn Foundation. The ultimate goal of the Advanced Stewardship Program is to complete a tailored preservation plan for the institution. To learn more, or if you would like to get involved, contact Andrea Cakars, Museum Director at (856)964-3333 or [cchsnj@verizon.net](mailto:cchsnj@verizon.net).

### 2007 Corporate Sponsors

The Camden County Historical Society would like to extend a sincere thank you to all of our corporate sponsors for their continued support.

AAA South Jersey  
 Airhandlers Mechanical Services, Inc.  
 1st National Bank  
 Perks Reutter Associates  
 PSE&G  
 Wegmans

In-kind contributions provided by:  
 Adventure Aquarium  
 Battleship New Jersey  
 Camden Riversharks Baseball Club

## Black History Month Tours of Pomona Hall By Andrea Cakars

During the month of February, the Camden County Historical Society will offer special tours of Pomona Hall geared towards honoring the memory of the enslaved people who lived and worked in the house and on the plantation during the colonial period.

It is known that there were enslaved people on the 412 acre estate owned by the Cooper family in Camden because they were considered property, and they were listed in wills and estate inventories. In this way, we know that Marmaduke Cooper inherited enslaved people named Cuff, Grace, Greg, Mark, Luke, Sam, and Peter from his father Isaac, after Isaac's death in 1767. He may have purchased others, inherited others from different family members and received others from his wife's family with her dowry. And, of course, under the system in place, if a woman Marmaduke owned had a child, that child would be enslaved to Marmaduke for life, perpetuating the system. Also, since the Cooper family and Marmaduke in particular, owned several properties, it is likely that he would move people around between estates, to avoid paying taxes on them, as was commonly done at the time. It is difficult to know details of the lives of the enslaved people of Pomona Hall as they were not necessarily recorded, but it is important that we try to piece them together from what records there are, to give a voice to people who survived against such terrible odds, being ripped violently from their homes, treated as property and forced to work.

Many people only think of slavery as a Southern institution without realizing that it was very prevalent right here in the Delaware Valley and New Jersey as a whole. In fact, slavery was greatly encouraged by the English government as the most economical way for settlers to work the land and industries, disregarding any moral issues. In fact, land was given to colonists who imported Africans as slaves, as many as 60 acres of land per enslaved African imported in 1664. By 1790 there were 14,185 enslaved people in New Jersey, about 12 percent of the colony's population. New Jersey was the last of the Northern states to make slavery illegal. There were still some enslaved people in the state up to the time of the Civil War.

Because the laws in New Jersey were very much in support of the institution of slavery, people came from other colonies, and later states, to buy and sell enslaved people within New Jersey's borders. An important place in the local slave trade was in what is now Wiggins Park, which was called Cooper's Ferry. This is where members of the same Cooper family as those that built Pomona Hall, operated a ferry service between Philadelphia and Camden and also held slaves auctions.

Not all Quaker settlers were in favor of slavery as the Coopers were. After much discussion, the Haddonfield Friends Meeting, which Marmaduke Cooper attended, determined that they would try to convince their slaveholding members to free the enslaved people in their possession. In 1780, after visiting Marmaduke and speaking with him, when he still refused, he was expelled from the Meeting until he could be "brought to do this common justice to fellow man."

The Black History Month tour at Pomona Hall looks at each room in the house from the position of the domestic workers, what their duties and responsibilities were and how they would have been treated. Working as cooks in the kitchen, nursemaids and nannies for the children, farmhands, gardeners, laundresses, seamstresses, scrubwomen and laborers of all kinds, African Americans were an essential part of New Jersey society from the very beginning of the colonial period. It has been a long hard road for African American contributions to be recognized, but it is important that we do so now, even for those whose names have been forgotten. It is important to remember and to continue to learn from this painful part of the past. As it is only through knowledge and understanding that we can grow and evolve.

Please come and experience this powerful tour on Thursdays and Sundays throughout February. If you are interested in bringing a group for the tour, please call (856)964-3333 to schedule an appointment.



Photo, left and right, servants room located on the second floor of Pomona Hall.

**February is Black History Month**

**The Camden County Historical Society**

**presents**

***Slavery and the Underground Railroad*  
Suitcase Learning Program**

**Slavery and the Underground Railroad Suitcase Learning Program meets New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards for Social Studies and is presented by the Society's certified teacher in your classroom.**

**Students will understand how slavery began in the New World, why it was accepted at the time and the need for freedom for those enslaved. Students will identify why the Underground Railroad was needed and read maps to trace the escaped slaves to freedom in the North.**

**Reservations for Slavery and the Underground Railroad Suitcase Learning Program are being accepted for Black History Month or anytime throughout the school year.**

**Cost: \$50.00 per classroom**

**To schedule your program please contact the  
Camden County Historical Society at:**

**(856)964-3333**

**email: [cchsnj@verizon.net](mailto:cchsnj@verizon.net)**

**website: [www.cchsnj.com](http://www.cchsnj.com)**



**Camden County Historical Society**  
P.O. Box 378  
Collingswood, NJ 08108-0378

Non-Profit Organization  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Permit No. 8  
South Jersey  
08031