

Antiques are valued because they offer a glimpse of a time gone by, as well as the values and experiences of that era. Generally, they are more than 100 years old. The Mrs. Fowlers are 100% antique on the first two counts. In three years, they will qualify as antiques on the third count. These women, however, are not just remnants of the past; they can look upon a town that they have helped fashion, a Boonton that is better for the unexpected turn in the road that brought Pat and Mae this way.

## Christmas in July! (August & September!)



Handmade Christmas Ornaments  
50 cents!



*Sale Ends September 30, 2003*



The Gift Shop  
at  
The Boonton Museum



All Christmas Bibs \$4 Off!



MUSEUM & GIFT SHOP ARE OPEN SATURDAYS FROM 1 TO 4 PM OR BY APPOINTMENT!

**MEMBERSHIP IN THE BOONTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY/MUSEUM:** Would you like to join the society/museum?

Membership Fees: \_\_\_ Individual \$15. \_\_\_ Family \$20. \_\_\_ Seniors/Students \$10.  
\_\_\_ Business/Profession \$25. \_\_\_ Life \$200. (RENEWABLE EVERY NOVEMBER)

Make check payable to: Boonton Historical Society and Museum

Please mail to: 210 Main Street Boonton, New Jersey 07005 (attn: Ellen Dixon). Thanks!

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

# GEM OF THE MOUNTAINS

(THE NEWSLETTER OF THE BOONTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM)

JULY/AUGUST 2003

VOLUME IV No2

210 MAIN STREET BOONTON, NEW JERSEY 07005

WWW.BOONTON.ORG

973 402-8840

EAMARLATT@ATT.NET

## The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Not Forgotten at the Boonton Historical Society and Museum

Plans are being made to expand the permanent exhibit and timeline through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The current exhibit and timeline are from 1715 to 1903 and chronologically follows Wendt's book: Boonton Was an Irontown (available in our gift shop). Discussions are being held concerning expanding the museum to another floor of the Dr. John Taylor House. A fundraising campaign has begun for this expansion. If you are interested in contributing to it, please fill out the form at the top of page 2 and send in your tax deductible contribution. If you would like to work on this exhibition, please contact Ed Marlatt at 718 680-5132 or [eamarlatt@att.net](mailto:eamarlatt@att.net).

### Fourth Graders Visit the Museum

This spring, 3 fourth grade classes from John Hill School and one fourth grade class from Our Lady of Mount Carmel School visited the Boonton Historical Society and Museum. They were studying local history and were given a short talk about Boonton's history, followed by a tour of the exhibits and the gift shop.

### Historic Homes of Boonton House Tour

The house tour sponsored by the BHS&M on May 17<sup>th</sup> raised approximately 3 thousand dollars from sponsorships and ticket sales. Thanks to the house tour committee of Gail Yorkston, Ellen Dixon, Dee Kromka-Johnson, Susan Thomas, and Eric Wallin. Students from the performing arts program of the Academy of Visual and Performing Arts @ Boonton High School were dressed as local historical figures at the George Esten House (Yorkston Residence). We would also like to thank the house docents and museum volunteers for their time. If you would like to have your home on the 2005 House Tour, please contact Gail Yorkston at 973 335-9059.

### Fauna Painting by Pieter Prall

There is a current exhibition of fauna painting by the well-known local artist and conservationist, Pieter Prall. The exhibit includes prints and paintings. Some of the artwork is for sale, with proceeds going to the Boonton Historical Society and Museum. It is on view through September 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Historic Trivia:** Who was the 19<sup>th</sup> century US Congressman from Boonton who invented the penny postcard for the Post Office Department (now the US Postal Service)?

### Message from the President

We have some new, exciting plans for the BHS&M. We are preparing to expand to another floor of the Dr. John Taylor House in order to update the permanent exhibit and timeline to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In October, we will commence a new walking tour: "Vaux & Olmstead in Boonton". Also in the fall, we will have an exhibition and program about Boonton's famous civil engineer, Othmar Amman.

I would like to thank the Tri-Town Chamber of Commerce for the "Citizen of the Year Award", Senator Bucco for the "Volunteer Citation Award", Mayor Bolcar for the "Citizenship Proclamation", and the Morris County Vocational-Technical School for the "Outstanding Service Award". I appreciate the recognition. My new home phone number is 718 680-5132, if you would like to reach me. See you at our upcoming events!

Sincerely yours, *Edward A. Marlatt*

**Answer to Historic Trivia:** John Hill (1821-1884) was the US Congressman from Boonton who invented the penny postcard. The elementary school is named after him.

## CONTRIBUTION TO THE “BOONTON IN THE 20TH CENTURY FUND”

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Contribution (tax deductible) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

If you like to contribute to the new permanent exhibit, please mail this form and check to: “Boonton in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century”, 210 Main Street Boonton, New Jersey 07005

THANKS!

### Computerization of Collections

A grant is being applied for from the New Jersey Historical Commission to partially fund the computerization of the collections of BHS&M. The grant will potentially cover expenses for organization, photography, data entry and personnel involved in this momentous task, which will bring our collections into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Thanks to Jennifer Coultas for her time and work in writing the grant.

### Master Bridge Builder Exhibit and Program

An exhibit and program titled: “Othmar Amman, Boonton’s Master Bridgebuilder” will take place in the fall. The exhibit will open on October 4<sup>th</sup> and the program is scheduled for November 19<sup>th</sup>. The exhibit will include photographs from the recent exhibit at Princeton University about Swiss born engineers. Mr. Amman was born in Switzerland, but lived in Boonton at 272 Rockaway Street from 1918 to 1958. Dr. Margot Amman-Durrer, daughter of Othmar Amman will speak about her father at the November 19th program and annual membership meeting. There will also be a showing of the PBS presentation “Great Feats of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Othmar Amman: Bridgebuilding” at this program.

### New Walking Tour

On Saturday, October 11<sup>th</sup>, at 10AM there will be a new walking tour titled: “Vaux and Olmstead in Boonton”. The tour will begin in Grace Lord Park and go through the park to Morris Avenue and then go down Rockaway Street back to the park. The Boonton DPW cleared a walking path through the park for this tour. The tour will discuss and point out sites of the area of Boonton that was laid out by the eminent landscape architectural firm of Vaux and Olmstead of New York. The 19<sup>th</sup> century firm was well-known for many projects, including Central Park which is celebrating its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. The “Ironworks/Canal Hollow” tour will take place on August 9<sup>th</sup> and the “Main Street” tour will take place on September 13<sup>th</sup>. These tours begin at 10AM, also.

### Ku Klux Klan in Boonton

During the 1920’s the USA had a large and active Ku Klux Klan movement. At that time, Boonton had a functioning chapter with activities and marches. The movement in town was “in protest” to the large immigration change happening in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. We are seeking information about the KKK in Boonton for a possible program presentation. Please contact Ed Marlatt at 718 680-5132 or [eamarlatt@att.net](mailto:eamarlatt@att.net), if you have any information or would like to help out with this program. Stories about the KKK in Boonton are found in Arthur Rabin’s book, Voices of America: Boonton (2001), available in our gift shop.

\* \* \* \* FEATURE \* \* \* \*

## The Two Mrs. Fowlers

By Pam Hance

“Her face, as she prepares the Art that is her gift, is a legacy of respect for the possibilities – and the will to grasp them.”  
from *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* by Alice Walker

The young Brooklyn Heights housewife shook off her disappointment and started searching through the Sunday *New York Times* for a house to rent in New Jersey. Mae Fowler had been hoping that Bell Labs would transfer her husband Alex to Connecticut, but the company’s new branch was to be in Murray Hill instead. By Monday afternoon, however, she had fallen in love with the aged allure of a house on River Road in Boonton. Within two days, Alex and Mae Fowler had signed a lease and in August of 1937, the young family of four moved into the Miller-Kingsland house, the town’s oldest dwelling, which includes a room built by Jacob Miller around 1740. The house, in good repair, included 5

surrounding acres, as well as electricity and plumbing. At \$50 a month it was just what the young Fowlers could afford in a country that had been struggling for over eight years in the deep, extended economic slump, known as the Great Depression.

Nine years earlier, on the main street of Boonton, a sassy young lady had stepped off a bus after a two-day trip from Pennsylvania. New Jersey’s teachers’ salaries, almost double what was offered in her home state, had lured her across the border, and although she hadn’t expected to find the people as friendly as Pennsylvanians, nor the land as pretty as the mountains she had left behind her, she was pleasantly surprised by the friendly greetings of the people she passed on Main Street, as well as by the lovely sight of the Jersey City Reservoir. Mr. Mann, the superintendent, hired the town’s new kindergarten teacher, Miss Pat Thornton, with a promise of a modern classroom in a brand new school within three years accepted a job at the Harrison Street School.

On a pleasant September morning, several years later, Mae Fowler stepped into that charming and pretty new classroom, holding her oldest daughter, Erskine, by the hand. Sunlight streamed through the generously proportioned bay window, shining cordially on the curving window seat and illuminating the floor pattern of exciting circles and geometric figures. A large fireplace dominated the far wall and, above it, semi-circular oil paintings decorated the walls. One of Mother Goose atop a flying white goose, blue skirt, petticoat hems and bonnet ribbons rippling in the wind was, indeed, the most distinctive. Mrs. Mae Fowler left Erskine in the charge of Miss Pat Thornton (who had married by now and was also Mrs. Fowler, though not related). By the time all three of Mae’s children had attended Mrs. Fowler’s class in that lovely room and Mae had become a member of the school board, the two Mrs. Fowlers were pretty well acquainted.

Mae Fowlers’ children joined the long parade of kindergarteners to march through Pat’s classrooms. Pat Fowler, born to be a teacher, had a flare for infusing education with celebration and pragmatism. When John Hill School was completed, on Valentine’s Day 1931, she led her children in procession from Harrison Street to their room in the new school. When the clock tower atop town hall needed one more face, she channeled the children’s energy into community service with Dimes for Time, an endeavor that succeeded in raising the funds for the clock face. After forty-six years of teaching, she donated a flower garden as her retirement gift. It was planted in front of her kindergarten classroom (which by now was located in a small, brick house across the street from the old stone high school).

With the children in school, Mae found the time to focus on a hobby. She had always kept a garden, which provided fresh vegetables for her family from Spring to Autumn. Mae, who was an Alabama-born girl, planted okra and picked the zucchini “just before the blossom falls from the fruit”. But now there was time to put her hand to clay.

She began by making hand built figures, and later purchased a wheel and a kiln. It wasn’t long before she was giving lessons to others. Soon, an informal cooperative of potters was gathering at Mae’s house. After the first sale grossed \$1000 for the group of ten craftspeople, the annual craft show at the barn became a tradition. For twenty-seven years, people flocked to the red barn at the bend of River Road to enjoy and buy the pottery, as well as the quilts, paintings and sculpture of local artisans.

Today, Mae and Pat both remember with a laugh all the confusion caused by the telephone calls for the other Mrs. Fowler, mistakenly placed to their busy homes. Still, their homes continue to ring with a portion of Boonton’s history.

The Alex Fowlers maintained the Miller-Kingsland house in good condition and with respect for its historic integrity. In adding a room, they took care to install wide floorboards to remain consistent with the 14-inch boards in the older sections of the house. A custom-made Colonial-style cabinet was built beneath a bank of windows. This room is where Mae spends most of her time these days, surrounded by the beauty her life has generated. In one corner is a surprisingly small and simple old Singer with steel, not plastic, parts. A large cabinet, decorated with painted lemons, grapes and pomegranates by the hand of Mrs. Fowler, overflows with quilt-makings, color-coded and neatly folded. Mice of clay, birds of driftwood and hand-made dolls populate the top of the custom cabinet, a collection of favorite pieces crafted by, given to, or purchased by Mae. The rest of the house is a showcase of craftsmanship and aesthetics. Two picture quilts hang in a sitting room, Grandma Moses-like depictions of the Alabama home where Mae spent her girlhood and the Miller-Kingsland house where she raised her family. And throughout, the house is plastered with the bold, colorful and promising artwork of her five great-grandchildren. Across the road, lies two and a half acres along the Rockaway River, half the original five bought with the house, now a dedicated wild life preserve, donated by Mae.

Mrs. Pat Fowler has launched the formal education of some 2000 Boontonites, many of whom are still delighted to catch a sighting of their teacher in the local market. She claims them as her children and even has a memory for their names. A box of mementos and newspaper clippings contains the rosters of every one of her classes, each name in faded type, alphabetically listed by afternoon and morning sessions. She can name the husbands and wives, siblings and grandchildren of those who stayed local. And she is certainly well aware of the outstanding achievements of *her* inventors, scientists, authors, professors, teachers and lawyers. Her impeccable house is adorned with paintings by Doctor Wiggins and Pearl Clark, familiar names to long-time Boonton residents. Her collection also includes pieces by John Redington and Charlie Peer, as well as their art teacher, Edgar Craven. But don’t expect to find her at home gazing at her paintings or thumbing through reminders of her career. For many years after retirement, Pat shuttled senior citizens to clinics and grocery stores. Today, she keeps busy visiting friends, attending church functions and hosting two bridge groups a week.