



The Boonton Historical Society & Museum

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Open Saturdays and Sundays
from 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.
and by appointment.

Open Sundays only as of January 2011.

New Sign For The Museum

Our museum sign was damaged by weather over the years and finally succumbed to rot during a storm this past winter when we had to replace it.

Our new sign has now been installed. As many of our members know, we share the Dr. John Taylor Building with the American Legion Post #124. After WW11, returning soldiers formed American Legion Post #124. Dr. Peck, an associate in the medical practice of Dr. John Taylor, was one of the trustees of the Legion Post. He negotiated with Dr. John and Adelaide (Kanouse) Taylor to purchase the building as a location for the Post. Soon afterwards, the Mayor and Aldermen purchased the building from the Post and dedicated it as a permanent memorial to veterans and a home for Post #124. The Legion also offered space to the Boonton Historical Society. On November 11, 1980, the Society opened its museum on the second floor. This arrangement continued for ten years until the building was declared unsafe and it was closed to the public.

The building sat idle until the Committee to Save the John Taylor building sought funding to renovate the building. The funding came from several sources. The largest portion came from a state grant, but there were also sizeable donations from the American Legion Post #124 and the Boonton Historical Society. More money came from individuals who were interested in seeing this portion of Boonton's history kept alive and retained by the town. The renovations were completed by professional tradesmen and a few, tireless volunteers. The building was reopened in May, 1997.

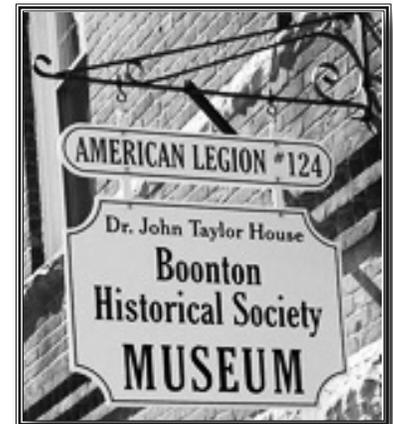


Photo Courtesy of Candace Grant

We are grateful for generous donations from the American Legion and from Edward Marlatt, past president of the Boonton Historical Society.

Gem of the Mountains



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The Two Mrs. Fowlers

By Pamela R. Hance
From *Gem of the Mountains*
(2002)

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, which was 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.

“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



Helen "Pat" Fowler celebrates her 100th birthday at The Boonton Historical Society afternoon tea.

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 accepted a job at the Harrison Street School. 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.

On a pleasant September morning, several years later, Mae Fowler stepped into that charming and pretty new classroom, holding her eldest 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 circled and geometric figures. A large fireplace dominated the far wall and, above it, semi-circular oil paintings decorated the walls. One of

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Boonton Was A Great Place To Grow Up

Joe Strelec, Sr. grew up in Boonton. A link on the Town Of Boonton's website (www.Boonton.org) will lead you to Joe, Sr's fabulous collection of Boonton postcards and photographs. Joe's eldest son, Joe, Jr. puts a lot of time into compiling and maintaining the website (www.boontonpostcards.com) and tells us that he gets some amazing e-mails from people all over the USA who have fond memories of the good ole days in Boonton. This is a not for profit site which has been visited by over 43,000 individuals. The public is invited to visit the site and can download whatever they want **free of charge**.

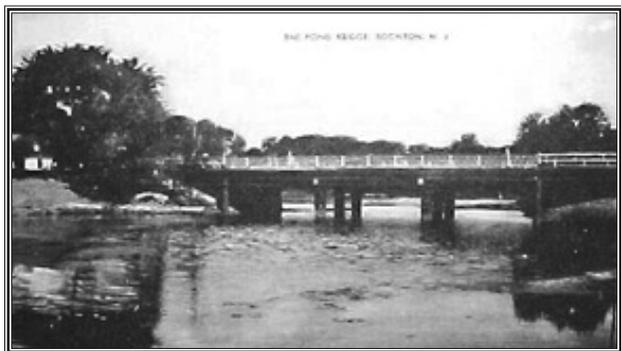
One of Joe's recent e-mails was from Rick Antero, who currently lives in Green Township, N. J. Here's what he wrote:

Boonton was great place to grow up...

Do you remember the first driver of the Boonton Trolley? It was my father Bill "Willie" Antero. The Trolley was made by the infamous Les Dunham. Les worked on custom automobile conversions, many of them for the movie industry and some of its illustrious characters.



Boonton Trolley



The Pond Bridge

Doris Cook, wife of Tom Cook, was probably responsible for teaching three generations of kids how to swim up at Pond bridge, I was one of them!

Other interesting memories for me are the Riverside A C club. They sponsored our only youth football program. We played our games on the high school field or at John Hill field and our practice field was behind Del's Village where the bank is today. There was also a carnival there even before FAN FARE (the fundraising festival which benefited Riverside hospital)

There was Zandel's shoes across from Groboys and right next to the bank. It was directly across from the State theatre. Speaking of the State Theatre, Dutchie was the old guy with the cigar in his mouth ALL the time and Gilda was the friendly lady in the window where you bought your ticket. As a kid growing up I probably went to the movies at least once a weekend. There was never a time that I went to the theatre and didn't see a policeman standing in the front of the seats watching the movie!! (probably my motivation to become one !!). The State theatre was only one of two theatres in the entire country that you walked in under the screen and the people in the theatre were facing you. The other was located in Allentown PA and has since burned down

Years ago the boardwalk between the old Shirley shop and Bobs Men's shop was much larger and longer and had stairs that went all the way down to Plane St. And who could forget the old church on Main Street, where the new post office is now? Remember when they tore it down one Saturday afternoon and nearly everyone in town was there to watch as the one guy from Catanzarro demolition kept ramming his bulldozer into it until it collapsed.

Right across the street they filmed the movie "Toxic Avenger" (1984). They also filmed in Grace Lord Park as well at Main and William streets.

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Demolition of the Methodist Church



The Methodist Church

Oh, and who could forget Whalen drugs?? It was the stereotypical drug store from the 40's and 50's with a soda fountain where they made the absolute best milk shakes!! (A scale model of Whalen's is on view as part of the Museum's current exhibit, "Bits & Pieces of Boonton's Past." Ed.)



Jennifer Coultas with model of Whalen's

And how about Mert's meat market? Mr. & Mrs. Merchak made half loaf sandwiches on fresh Manfredonia bread. My mouth is watering for one now. How about Ratti's?. They had the absolute best hamburger/cheeseburger special in the world. Great milk shakes there too. Oh, and who could forget the diner right across the street at the "greasy spoon"? Alster's liquors, the Pick & Shovel tavern, Mr. D's tavern, Marcello's sporting goods, the only place besides Rockaway Sales in Rockaway to buy sporting goods in the county! Walt's candy store right next to Henrietta's. Or how about Brown's market on Cedar street! The killing ground (playground) at OLMC school where more kids got there heads cracked open than anywhere else in town. Down the river at "Indian Rock" or jumping out of the tree down in the basin, the pot hole too!



Swimming Hole

Jumping off of the Reservoir Bridge with your shoes on because the water hurt your feet from that height. The summer dances at the basin behind the wall that stretched from Conti Electric to the park at the river. There wasn't room for one more behind to sit on that wall!

Corky's barber shop, The ACME in Del's village. And who started Santaland??? It was Bertie Cronk. He was Street Department Superintendent and he knew every kid in town by his/her first name. Who built the now existing Santaland?, Edmund De Diminicus. An incredible contribution to the youth of "Boot in"

Harmony Drum corps., the observatory at Sheep Hill and how many times you slept out up there! I could go on for ever. Yes, Boonton was a great place to grow up.

**Images in this article from
www.boontonpostcards.com**

The Pathways of History Museum Tour



President Jennifer Coultas prepares to greet guests at the Boonton Museum

We greeted 155 visitors at the Boonton museum and the Miller-Kingsland House during the Pathways of History museum tour

weekend. Sponsored by the museums of Boonton, Boonton Township, Montville Township, Kinnelon and Butler, the event featured costumed hosts, music, weaving and cooking demonstrations at various locations. As well as guests from our local area, visitors from Australia, Paris (France), and Florida signed our guest book at the Miller-Kingsland House.

Our weekend activities in Boonton started with a walking tour of the historic residential district led by Harold Johnson. Harold discussed the history, people and the architecture of the Town of Boonton as it is connected with the houses, churches and buildings constructed between the 1830's and 1890's for workers and officials of the New Jersey Iron Company in Boonton.



The New England Players

A program of music ranging from Tudor arrangements to pieces contemporary with the age of the house was presented. Two songs were performed by Barbara Busch: The Riddle Song (a Kentucky folk song) and The Deaf Woman's Courtship (an Appalachian folk song).

Museum volunteers and trustees worked hard greeting visitors, giving tours of the Miller-Kingsland House and serving the delicious ginger zucchini muffins made by Joy DeVincenzi. In addition, we accepted food and monetary donations from our generous visitors for our local food bank.



Harold Johnson with walking tour participants.

The highlight of our afternoon activities on both days of the Pathways Tour, was a musical performance on recorders by the New England Players: Gillian Otto (soprano), Barbara Busch (alto) and Katherine Otto (tenor).



Olga Dennett, Joy DeVincenzi & Paula Scerbo Pathways volunteers at the Miller Kingsland House.

Museum Donation

As a non-profit organization, we are dependent on, and grateful to, donors for thinking of us when finding new homes for items of historical interest to our town. The Ashland Company donated two glass and wood display cases to the museum and in addition we gratefully acknowledge their donation of:

- Four framed water colors of Drew/ Ashland by local artist Russ Conn
- One framed, handwritten list of employees who served in WWII
- Variety of black and white photos showing company events circa 1960

Ashland also made donations to the Kingsland House and the Boonton Holmes Library. As this facility closes in Boonton, it seems appropriate to discuss the history of a company which played a major role in our town's growth and prosperity.

THE GREAT DREW CHEMICAL COMPANY *By Dick Lewis*

In 1917, the economy of Boonton was given a boost when the firm of E. F. Drew & Co., moved to town and took over the old Knox Hat Factory. The company was established in 1907 in East Boston, Massachusetts, in a small two-story structure. Today the complex which houses Drew Chemical Corporation covers 25 acres and encompasses 90 buildings. A new laboratory will soon be built on an additional 80 acres.

In those early days in Massachusetts the firm became active as importers of coconut, palm and other vegetable oils. By 1913 the firm had become one of the largest importers of coconut oil and in that year a branch office was opened in New York City. From 1913 to 1917 the firm experienced general expansion and construction of an edible oil refinery was begun in Boonton in 1917.

The plant was a sprawling brick structure, its principal addition to the local scene being two large smoke stacks – one of brick the other of steel. The operation in 1917 could hardly be called mass production.

With one small refining tank, employees managed to refine a limited amount of oil and then went into action to sell that oil as quickly as possible. Money received from one railroad car of oil was used immediately to purchase another car of oil to refine and thus the cycle was repeated.

During ten year period from 1927 to 1937, Drew's expansion led to the formation of three associate corporations: Wecoline Products, Inc., Napthole, Inc., and the American Coiloid Corporation. The company, having specialized in coconut oil and its derivatives in the early years, now expanded operations in the general oil and chemical field through conversion of its by-products.

During the following decade, 1937 to 1947, the new refinery in Boonton brought about a considerable increase in the company's edible business. Drew's growth since 1947 created a multi-plant, multi-division, corporation. In 1949 a modern edible oil refinery was begun. This new equipment is capable of processing several different stocks at once. At present (1967) the plant uploads a tank car an hour on a 24-hour daily basis.

In 1961, the firm was sold to Lehman Bros., and investment banking firm and the name changed to Drew Chemical Corporation by which it is now known. Drew manufactures a sweeping variety of products for other industries. There is almost no field which does not call on Drew for some of its ingredients. The premium margarine on your breakfast table; the cold water rinses; heavy duty color wash products and fluff additives in your laundry soap; powder bleaches – all come from Drew Research.

Drew makes vitamins for the dairy industry; cleansing compounds for the dry cleaning industry; non-slip detergents for washing floors in hospitals, hotels and restaurants; spot less rinses for dishwashers; hand cleansers; vitamins and other additives for the animal nutrition field; marine, animal and vegetable proteins for feed manufacturers; automobile radiator cleansers; polishes and cleaners for car finishes; boiler water treatments for ocean going ships; fuel oil additives for conditioning heavy oils; the official parachute used during the Korean War; cotton softeners and other processes for the textile industry; oils and fatty products for the leather industry. And its all done here in Boonton.

*From The Boonton Years 1867-1967,
Compiled for the Boonton Centennial Committee,
Maudie Fischer, Editor.*

Continued from page I:

The Two Mrs. Fowlers.

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 Mrs. Pat Fowler (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 Fowler's 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 the 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 a 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 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 be-

fore 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 corner 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 the echo of a portion of Boonton's history.



Mae Erskine (Merk) Fowler

Photograph Courtesy Su (Fowler) Lum

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 cabinet was built beneath a bank of windows. This room is where Mae spend 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 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 showcase of craftsmanship and aesthetics. Two picture quilts hang in a sitting room, each a self-portrait of Mae's heart, 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 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

Continued on next page

house, now a dedicated wild life preserve and fauna, 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 husband 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 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.

Antiques are valued because they offer a glimpse of a time gone by, as well as the values and experiences of an 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 Boonton that they have helped create, a Boonton that is better for the unexpected turn in the road that brought them this way.



Photo Courtesy of Jennifer Coultas

BOONTON

by Sara Teasdale
(1884-1933)

I know a bright world of snowy
hills at Boonton
A blue and white dazzling light
on everything one sees
The ice-covered branches of
the hemlock sparkle
Bending low and twinkling in
the sharp thin breeze,
And iridescent crystals fall
and crackle on the snow
crust
With the winter sun drawing
cold blue shadows from
the trees.

Editor's Note



As a follow up to our article about the Women's Improvement Society by Mrs. Charles Seabury, Richard Seabury, III, sent us this picture of Mrs. Ruth Williams Seabury, circa 1925. Mr. Seabury notes that she was a woman ahead of her time, active in many community projects and a suffragette.



Ruth
Williams
Seabury
(circa 1925)