

Gem of the Mountains



Spring 2011 • Edition I

The Boonton Historical Society & Museum

Looking Back On Main Street

Fred and Anna Leystra had a bakery at 209 Main Street in the 1930s. Their nephew recently donated a 16mm film to the historical society that showed Fred at work in the bakery. These photos were created from the film. They show Fred and a younger helper working with yeast dough to make yummy creations that were sold in the shop. Notice the customers at the front of the store in one of the photos. We don't know what the bakery was called when the Leystras owned it, but after they sold it, the new owner continued a bakery in the same location. They called it O'Hagan Bakery.

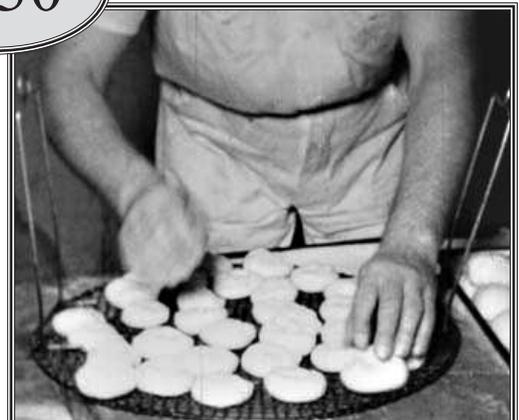
We are having the film converted to a DVD, and then we will be presenting it during one of our programs. The Leystras' nephew also gave us films that show our Labor Day parade in 1941

and 1942. We will show those, too. Stay tuned for upcoming details.

In the meantime, we want to thank the Leystras' nephew, Mark vander Weert, who lives in Georgia, for making the effort to find us and donate the films to us.



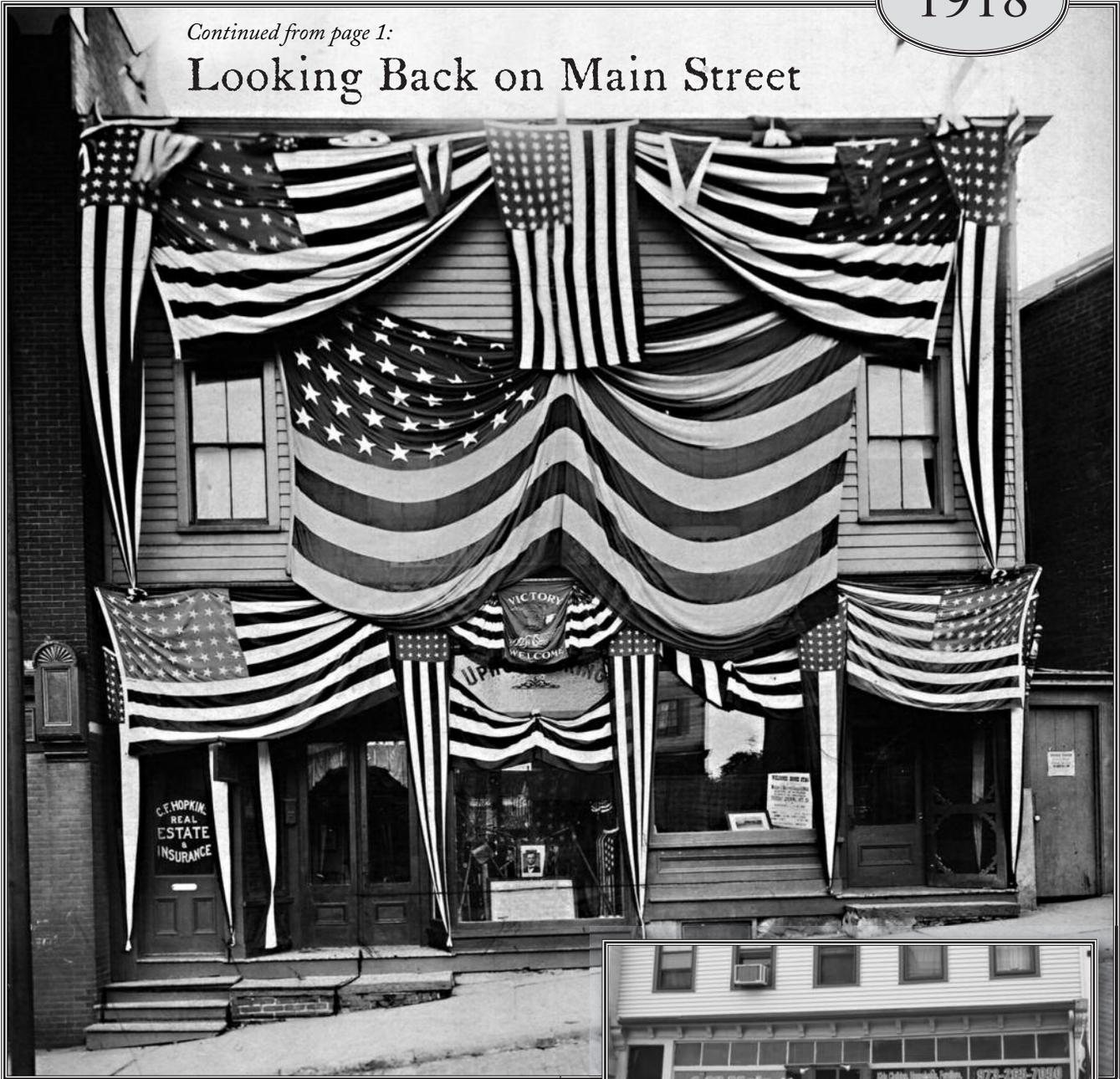
Circa
1930



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Looking Back on Main Street



The Hopkins-Scholz building 410-412 Main Street was decorated by Robert E. Scholz for the Welcome Home Parade in 1918 for returning veterans of WWI.

The building was built by Mr. Charles F. Hopkins, a Civil War veteran, former mayor of Boonton and Postmaster, c1870, and then was occupied by Hopkins Harness Maker, Mr. Trimble's Barber Shop and the Hopkins Hall where, in 1891, the Boonton volunteer Fire Department was organized.

In 1918 the building was occupied by Scholz Upholstery Shop, Trimble's Barber Shop and the



offices above by Mr. Hopkins Real Estate and Insurance. In 1920, the building was bought by Robert Scholz and subsequently was occupied by Daniel Ostrander's "The Wedge" which featured fine antiques and collectibles, Nicole's Dressmaking and Eleanor Scholz Dollhouse Miniatures.

Today the building is home to the 4-10 Consignment store.

8th Grade Gradation

at Our Lady of Mount Carmel School 1921



*First row (l to r): 1) _____ 2) Louise Toscano Prevost 3) Michaelina Marcello Scerbo,
Father James Delahanty, 4) _____ 5) _____ 6)*

*Second Row (l to r): 1) Tony Leone 2) _____ 3) _____ 4) _____ 5) _____ 6) Jennie Verdi Marro
7) _____ 8) Irene Dunn 9) Victor Hillery*

The present school was not built until 1926, so these students attended the four-room school (then called St. Mary's School) on the ground floor of a building that occupied the lot at the corner of Birch and Oak streets. That building has since been knocked down.

Ernestine Prevost Cascella and Lucille Hopkins Scerbo provided us with some of the names from

this graduating class. If you can fill in some of the blanks, please let us know. One of our upcoming programs will feature old photographs for which we are seeking more information and we hope you will join us in our efforts to identify the people and places from our past.

Local Culture at Its Best

By John Fea

Every year on the Saturday after Thanksgiving my wife and two daughters, along with my large extended family, put on layers and layers of warm clothes and head down to Main Street in Boonton, New Jersey to watch the town's annual Christmas parade.

The parade usually includes local Girl Scout troops, a few small bands, representatives from the local historical society dressed in period costumes, plenty of fire trucks, and a host of Boonton residents walking the streets in Elmo, Scooby-Doo, and Mickey Mouse costumes. The highlight, of course, is the arrival of Santa Claus.

The festivities are nothing to write home about. There are no fancy bells and whistles. But the parade does serve as a celebration of the life of a particular community in a particular place.

Boonton was the site of an 18th-century iron works and has always been a working-class town. My family arrived there sometime in the early 20th century as part of the wave of eastern European immigration that would redefine the ethnic make-up of the community. My grandparents were long time members of St. Cyril & Methodius Church, a Catholic parish founded in 1906 to accommodate Slovakian immigrants. My parents were married in this church and I have attended numerous baptisms, weddings, and funerals there. My mother and five of her six siblings, and many of my first cousins, are proud graduates of Boonton High School.

Technically, I did not grow up in Boonton. In the 1960s my parents bought a house near the border of Boonton and Montville Township. Though I attended school in Montville, I still lived within the orbit of the old iron town. (My parents still have a Boonton zip code).

Main Street in Boonton was the center of my economic world. I got my first pair of sneakers at Zandel's Shoes. I got my hair cut at Carlos' Barber-shop. I bought school clothes at The Laurie Shop. My first baseball glove was purchased at Marcello's Sporting Goods. I saw my first movie — The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams — at the town's historic movie theater. When my brothers and I got older we would ride our bikes into town to buy baseball cards at Newberry's



5 & 10 and get a slice of pizza at Roma's.

Most of these stores no longer exist. Like Main Streets throughout America, family-owned stores have been driven out of business by malls and big box stores. I remember how excited we all were in 1977 when a shopping mall opened in nearby Rockaway. I guess we were too young to see the effect that this mall would have on Main Street's small business owners.

Recently I have been encouraged by reports that the town is trying to make a comeback. This year's parade included a group of men and women who were part of a movement to restore and preserve Boonton's historical downtown district. If I still lived in the town I might consider joining this movement. Over the

Continued on next page

years I have developed a special affection for this place.

Boonton is just one example of the thousands of real places, populated by real people, struggling to survive in our placeless society of box stores, airports, and cyberspace. It is easy to dismiss concerns about the world of Mom and Pop shops, local commerce, and face-to-face community as mere nostalgia for a bygone era that will never return. Fair enough. But it is the job of the historian to make people aware of the things that have been lost.

The insatiable American appetite for progress has crippled local economies and the kinds of communities that these economies helped to foster. The Boonton of my childhood had a moral economy — a small-scale capitalism that was built on trust, reputation, and a general commitment to the common good. Such an economy allowed opportunities for generosity, conversation, and friendship.

Ivividly remember Marcello's working out a payment plan with my father so that he could buy trophies for our championship 6th grade basketball team. Carlos's Barber Shop was always filled with local men sharing the latest in town news and gossip. A trip to Main Street would inevitably result in a sidewalk encounter with a friend or extended family member.

The fate of towns like Boonton should be of particular interest to Christians. In his recent book, *To Change the World*, University of Virginia sociologist James Davison Hunter exhorts Christians to practice what he calls "faithful presence." Such "faithful pres-

ence" is incarnational. It is, as Hunter puts it, a "theology of commitment." It recognizes that the God of the Bible has always worked in particular places. It connects human flourishing with the nurture and cultivation of the communities where God has placed us.

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Hunter concludes that Christians can be effective witnesses in the world by investing their time, talent, and energies in communities, towns, and neighborhoods. It is in these kinds of places where we "learn forgiveness, and humility, practice kindness, hos-

pitality, and charity, grow in patience and wisdom, and become clothed in compassion, gentleness, and joy."

In other words, when we invest in a particular place we grow spiritually.

What are we doing to help create or recreate spaces of human interaction that allow God to work in our lives and the lives of our neighbors?

How are we contributing to a virtuous society where people think more about the common good than they do about their own self-interest? How are we serving the needs of the places where we live?

Atending the local Christmas parade is a start. But until we are willing to learn more about the people, the history, and the landscape of the communities where we live, the revitalization of places like Boonton will be difficult. We have a long way to go.



John Fea chairs the History Department at Messiah College in Grantham, PA. He blogs daily at www.philipvickersfithian.com. His "Confessing History" column appears at Patheos each Wednesday.

Extolling The Virtues of Boonton c 1910

(Extracted from Gem of the Mountains 1910)

BOONTON'S SOCIAL LIFE

By George U. Todd

The social, literary and musical activities of a community reflect the culture and tastes of its people and, in these respects, Boonton will appeal to the home-seeking, city-bred family, who will here find a hospitable welcome and a congenial environment. For those who enjoy the more quiet and pleasurable forms of social life there is a finely-equipped men's Club, conveniently and comfortably furnished. The men also have their business and fraternal organizations, the various lodges being well represented. The women have an enterprising Improvement Society, and there are the various card clubs and literary clubs, one of which, the Cosey Reading Club (see Gem of the Mountains, Spring 2010, Edition 1), has held weekly meetings for the past fourteen seasons. There is also a dramatic society which presents occasional highly entertaining plays.

For those who enjoy music, Boonton is highly favored, for here are to be found both vocal and instrumental organizations of merit. A choral society of nearly one hundred voices, organized some years ago, holds weekly rehearsals under the direction of a well-known musical director from New York City, and these rehearsals, together with the concerts given each season, afford the choral members and their friends and a large and representative list of subscribers musical entertainments of a high order.

ATTRACTIONS TO THE HOMESEAKER

By Herbert S. Hitchcock

From the standpoint of the home-seeker, the land buyer, and the real estate speculator few localities

have been so favored with natural advantages as the neighborhood in and around Boonton or lie so directly in the line of tremendous growth which is pushing out with amazing rapidity toward this section of the State. Situated well up in the Kittitiny Range it enjoys an excellent climate throughout the year, the summer months being cool and pleasant and the winter season mild and healthful. Owing to the altitude and miles of surrounding wooded country the air at all times is dry, clear, and invigorating.

Mountain springs furnish an unlimited supply of absolutely pure water and the entire locality is noted for its great scenic beauty. The Delaware and Lackawanna Railroad, considered the best commuting road out of New York City, in connection with the new tunnels, places Boonton within fifty-six minutes of the heart of that great metropolis and is fast becoming the most popular branch of rapid transit among the almost countless number of city and suburban dwellers who are leading the huge movement country-ward which originated and has grown to such proportions within the last

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few years. In the past, the advance of realty values in Boonton has been of an exceedingly conservative nature, barely keeping pace with the increase of population and at no time commensurate with the true worth of our natural attractions, accessibility, healthy environment, beautiful surroundings and business activity. These features have recently become essential to thousands of homebuilders to whom Boonton will immediately appeal and every indication points to a large increase in population and a rapid rise in the price of property in this locality within the next year or two

Boonton History Quiz

(Compiled by M. Scozzafava, Archivist for the Boonton Historical Society)

- 1 Before Boonton was incorporated as a town in 1867, it was part of a larger tract known as
 - a) Hanover Township
 - b) Pequannock Township
 - c) Mendham Township
- 2 Which Boonton citizen was awarded a Congressional Medal of Honor for an act of valor during the Civil War?
 - a) Dr. John Grimes
 - b) Charles F. Hopkins
 - c) John L. Kanouse
- 3 There were 23 locks and 23 planes along the total length of the Morris Canal. How many were in Boonton?
 - a) One plane, two locks
 - b) Two planes, one lock
 - c) No planes, one lock
- 4 Whose name appears on the façade of the first firehouse, which can still be seen at 713 Main Street?
 - a) Milos Lujanovits
 - b) Philip Wootton
 - c) John Maxfield
- 5 From which country did the first workers of the New Jersey Iron Company come?
 - a) Germany
 - b) England
 - c) France
- 6 Which church building was the first to be erected in Boonton?
 - a) St. John's Church
 - b) Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church
 - c) First Presbyterian Church
- 7 The Darress Theater on Main Street has also been known by what other name?
 - a) Harris Lyceum Theater
 - b) Mrs. Green's Opera House
 - c) State Theater
- 8 The granite obelisk monument on Main Street was built to commemorate which war?
 - a) Civil War
 - b) World War I
 - c) Revolutionary War
- 9 The stone to build the dam for the Jersey City Reservoir came from which town?
 - a) Denville
 - b) Montville
 - c) Parsippany
- 10 The arch bridge crosses over
 - a) Rockaway River
 - b) Morris Canal
 - c) DLW Railroad tracks

Answers to Boonton History Quiz: 1) b 2) b 3) a 4) c 5) b 6) c 7) c 8) a 9) b 10) a

Latest Donation

This tall case (grandfather) clock was made in 1804 in Boonton at the Banta farm house at 548 Lathrop Avenue.* It is 93 inches tall and 19 inches wide at the base and bonnet. The mahogany veneer is inlaid with a braiding decoration. There are fluted quarter columns down the sides of the case. Typically, the case was made by a cabinetmaker and the clock movements were made by a clockmaker.



Most clocks made in New Jersey had wooden works, and that is true of this clock. The face of the clock has a moon dial to show the phases of the moon and a dial to count seconds as well. The Roman numeral for the four is IIII instead of IV. Clock face makers before 1850 almost always used the IIII form.

This clock was donated to the Boonton Historical Society & Museum by Joyce Reigel Lee in October 2010. Joyce's mother was a Banta.

**This information was provided by Joyce.*



The Boonton Historical Society & Museum

210 Main Street
Boonton, New Jersey 07005

Reminder Please remember to let us know when you have changed your address and/or your e-mail address. Many of our announcements are now e-mailed to save on postage.



**The Boonton
Historical
Society
& Museum**

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



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Opinions expressed in the Gem of the Mountains are not necessarily those of the society.

