

Gem of the Mountains

Winter 2012 • Edition II



The Boonton Historical Society & Museum

Recollections of Boonton 1887-1897

By Duane E. Minard

In 1963, Duane E. Minard described his memories of Boonton when he was a young man. Born in Rockaway in 1880, his family moved to Montville in 1881 and opened a general store. In 1887, he was old enough to haul freight from the Boonton Freight Station, situated at the foot of the hill in the Park. He also hauled barrels of kerosene from the Standard Oil Warehouse adjoining the Freight House, both on the siding that came from Fanny Bridge. From 1887 to 1897, Mr. Minard tells us he was “quite familiar with Boonton and its business places. From 1895 to 1899, I worked in a fish and vegetable market in Boonton – first kept in the basement of Jake Kanouse’s Hotel on Main Street and then at Gil Crane’s building at the corner of Main Street and Myrtle Avenue. During that time, I drove a fish and vegetable wagon about Boonton where I had a “back door” acquaintance with almost every house and its inhabitants.”

He talks about the stores on Main Street, businesses that are now somewhat alien in our word of technology - wheelwrights, blacksmiths, coal yards and harness shops. From bakers and banks to plumbers and tin-smiths, he describes the characters, their families and partnerships. Although he admits that his recollections may have dimmed with age and perhaps all his mem-

ories are not historically accurate, his stories are peopled with familiar names, with amusing anecdotes and times when life was much simpler, and much harder, than we know it today. Nevertheless, his memories bear repeating and we have selected a few for this edition of Gem of the Mountains.

HARDWARE STORES

In the beginning, the only hardware store in Boonton was built by Esli B. Dawson, a veteran of the Civil War, who lived on the Flats, next to (the home of) Samuel L. Garrison, at the end of the first street that led from Washington Street, in the block that existed west of the Silk Mill Hill, that led to the railroad stations.



E. B. Dawson Store

His (Mr. Dawson’s) clerks were Dill Barton and Edmund Looker, son of Alan Looker, Jr., who drove the Silk Mill wagon, and grandson of Alan Looker, Sr. of Lyonsville.

Later John Meyers, who was Dawson’s clerk, then manager, continued the store after Dawson’s death, for some years.

The Dawson Store sold hardware, farm and household utensils, bicycles and sporting goods and, in a build-

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The Demolition of The Old Methodist Church on Main Street



Many of our readers will remember the demolition of the old Methodist Church on Main Street. The following recalls how it was recorded and photographed at the time by the Daily Record.

BOONTON — It was a moment of passing and a moment of drama as the high steeple on the Old Main Street Church was pulled down this weekend to make way for a new and expanded post office. The government purchased the old structure for \$100,000 last May.

It took three attempts to bring the steeple down. The first two failed when the cable snapped. There was one short moment of concern when a falling beam struck a workman. An eyewitness said the workman avoided the 12 by 12-inch beam, but was struck in the leg when it bounced off a truck. The man, employed by R. Davis Trucking Co., Parsippany, apparently unhurt, got up and returned to work. "Someone up there doesn't like this," the man said.

The razing of the church has left the Trinity of God congregation homeless. They had held services in the church from 1969 until May 1975, and now share a building with the local Methodists, another former congregation of the Old Main Street Church.

The United Methodist congregation called the old church home from its construction in 1868 until 1959, when they moved to their present building at the Lathrop and Vreeland Avenues intersection. The Methodist congregation had a \$200,000 mortgage on the new building but held a mortgage-burning party May 23.

The church was used as a warehouse for 10 years before the Trinity Congregation began using it. Ralph Fluharty, a member of the Trinity of God, recalled the final service in the old church. It was "on the last Sunday in May,

last year. The service was over around 9:30, but the membership stayed around, talking and praying and around 11 p.m. someone rang the old bell for the last time. "Bell-ringing at 11 p.m. was against Boonton law, he noted. Brother Wade Palmer, new leader of the Trinity congregation, said "we hated to lose the old



church, but when the government decides to take something, what can you do." Palmer, who came to Boonton from Georgia five weeks ago, said his group hoped

to find a four to five acre site in the Boonton-Montville area. The group would either convert an existing structure or build anew, he said.

The sequence photos below show the final moments of the Old Main Street Church steeple. From left workmen have connected the cable to the steeple (for the third time). The Caterpillar begins its backward yank on the cable and the steeple tilts in one piece. Finally, the steeple begins to break apart as it falls and finally, bottom right, it collapses in a pile.

Joshua, the Bible says, brought down the walls of Jericho with a trumpet. This steeple, erected years ago, was brought to the ground with hard labor, a strong cable and some modern equipment. Not easily felled, the steeple seemed to the worker shown below to have sprung to life in reaction to the demolition.

It was a moment
of passing and a
moment of drama
as the high steeple
on the Old Main
Street Church was
pulled down...



Hooray For The Small Town

By Richard Wendt

Growing up where I did as a kid was just amazing. I think you could have made a Saturday Evening Post cover off of so many of the places in town. To me the whole town was my playground. It would not be unusual for me to crawl out of bed on a weekend long before my parents would be up. I could go to a myriad of places that would take an entire day to explore. And many more that would take more than a day!

The River was always there. It kissed my back yard as a smooth canvas of sunlit sky and floating lilies of white and yellow. Or even an angry mess of eddy's and swirls brown with the tailings of dirt and spinning and tumbling trees uprooted by the torrents strength.

I lived on what they called the "Pond." It was made when they damned up the river at what is now Grace Lord Park. So it became a placid stretch of water that made a wonderful skating rink in the winter and a large public beach on the other side in the summer. I think between fishing and swimming and boating I probably spent 1/3 of my first 18 yrs of life on the river.

Then there was the Tourne. This was a mystical place of boyhood dreams of mountains and caves, of jagged cliffs and wild animals. Where one day you could be Audi Murphy or John Wayne and the next Davy Crockett or Daniel Boone. Where we built cabins and moved boulders. Got lost and yet found ourselves in the tranquility of its grasp. Camped in its hidden dens and drank from the pure waters of its bubbling springs. Hours seemed like only mere seconds when engulfed in its wonders.

Grace Lord Park was another. You could enjoy the toys of childhood in the area next to Main Street, The swings and slide. The seesaws and the merry-go-

round. Mr. Pickett's Hotdog Wagon at the curb. Santa Land in the winter. Concert in the Gazebo in summer. Kids running to & fro on the lawn. Taking long cool sips of water from the large Pudding Stone fountain in the middle of its landscape.

Or as we got a little older and perhaps braver we would delve into the hidden wonders of the Basins. At the base of the Dam where in the summer you could enjoy the cool mists of its thundering cascade. Or explore is flotsam gathered in piles upon its craggy outcrops. Maybe travel down the old Lovers Lane that wound its way amongst the Cedars and oaks and

Maples till it came upon the Deep hole and all its lore. Knowing its real use now takes away from the stories and tales that made it what you wanted it to be.

Down even further to the wonderful Arch Bridge that stands as a stalwart reminder of the beauty man is capable of. Oh and the glory of that first time you grew brave enough to clamber up the side of

Indian Rock. And stand precariously close to its edges'. Drinking in the panorama of the Park, and those not brave enough to climb up, below you. The wonder of the "Caves" and the "Smelter" the largeness of the wall that bordered the basins and the Tennis, Bocce and Basketball courts. The mystery of the old foundry and its buildings. How much trouble I got into for taking that short cut from School Street School down the stairs through the city parking lot and down the path to the park! Those whoop'ins were worth it!

I could go on and on about the Jersey City Reservoir and its bridge or the bike rides through the surrounding townships. Sunset Lake before it was drained and Sheep Hill before the observatory. Fireman's fair, Vreeland Avenue hill and and, and... all I can say is HOORAY FOR THE SMALL TOWNS!

To me the
whole town
was my
playground.

Reminiscences of Boonton

by Allen Voorhees

My memories of Boonton begin at 182 Kanouse Street. At that time Kanouse Street ran through to Myrtle Ave. We lived in the veterans homes. I learned to ride a bike there thanks to my father's friend, Nicky Bonanni. Nicky basically had me get on the bike, gave me a push and off I went. Barnes field was across the street, one was able to cut across Barnes Field through the woods and end up at John Hill School where the High School played baseball and Summer School (recreation) would be held.

A day of playing may have consisted of walking along the tow path, roller skating around the refreshment stand at Barnes Field with Barbara and Skipper Bedows. Winter fun would include sleigh riding down Vreeland Ave or Fireman Home, ice skating on the river or later on at the tennis courts. No matter what time of year, there was always something to do.

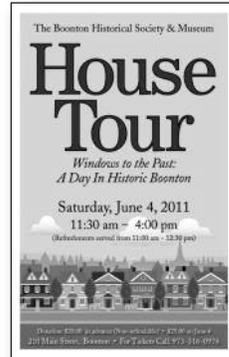
In 1957 we moved to 804 Main Street above Ludell's Dept store directly across from Newberry's. It is there that I can still hear Art Lefkowitz directing traffic. During the holidays, the bakery on Boonton Ave would pipe Christmas music out for everyone to hear.

The fire whistle would blow at 12 o'clock and we had a chart with all the codes for fire locations. Whether we lived on Main or in the flats the smell from E.F. Drew was always present, some days more than others. The little League Parade was always fun and tryouts at the tennis courts were a great sign that summer would soon begin.

These are just a few things I remember about growing up in Boonton. There are plenty more to write about, but for now that's enough. If you would like to hear more let me know. Boonton will always be in my heart.

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BHS & M Receives League Award



The Boonton Historical Society & Museum's 2011 House Tour Brochure, "Windows to the Past: A Day In Historic Boonton," has tied for third prize in the Kevin M. Hale Publications Awards competition of the League of Historical Societies of New Jersey. Our brochure material

was written and compiled by Jennifer Coultas, with layout and graphic design by Jim Kuhnert. This is the second publication award received by the Society. Our 2007 house tour brochure, also compiled and designed by Jennifer and Jim, was awarded a first prize. Congratulations.

The League of Historical Societies of New Jersey, founded in 1966, is composed of over two hundred twenty organizations that represent over forty five thousand individual members.

While most of the organizations in the league are local historical societies, it also includes statewide societies and related institutions, county agencies, museums,

libraries and archival groups, historic preservation agencies, and a variety of other organizations devoted to and interested in New Jersey history.



Joy DeVincenzi and Margaret Gilmer
with trustee Jennifer Coultas
who accepted the award
on behalf of the Society.

What's Been Happening This Year

SCHOOL VISITS

During May and June we entertained 162 students from Boonton Schools at the museum. After the last group from School Street School visited in June, we received a bundle of handwritten cards and letters of thanks. Here are some of the comments (most letters started with "Dear Historical Society"):

"One thing I learned was that SSS [School Street School] was the first free public school in Morris County."



"We loved how you dressed in period costumes."

"Thank you so much for teaching me about Boonton"



"I loved the gift shop"



"I have to say you are the nicest people I have ever met."

"It was the best time I ever had."

"I hope I can come again."



CELEBRATING 100 YEARS AT THE YMCA

The Lakeland Hills YMCA is celebrating 100 years in the community this year.

This event was recognized at the annual Citizen of the Year Awards held in May at the Sheraton Hotel. We were honored that members of the Historical Society were asked to participate, in costume, to add an historical note to this special occasion



L to R: Hank Gunderson, Joy DeVincenzi, Jennifer Coultas, Jayme Januszanis, Tammie Holloway, Eric Wallin and Claire Hance.

Walking Tours

THE IRON WORKS



“Boonton Ironworks and the Morris Canal” was the topic of our first walking tour of the year. Our tours of the ironworks area are led by Joe Macasek, author of “Guide to the Morris Canal in Morris County.” The Morris Canal crossed the northern part of New Jersey connecting New York Harbor at Jersey City with the Delaware River at Phillipsburg. Completed in 1831, this 102 mile canal was built across the rugged New Jersey Highlands to transport anthracite coal from the mines in Pennsylvania to new markets. Joe discusses canal history in the Boontons as well as pointing out the remnants of the canal and ironworks that still exist in our town.

THE PARK RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT

Starting at the Gazebo in Grace Lord Park, the tour of the Park Residential district proceeds along Rockaway and Reserve Streets in the Park section of Boonton and looks at (from the exterior) 10 distinct homes built in the latter part of the 19th century. The tour is led by Gail Yorkston who owns a home in the Rockaway historic district. This summer’s tour included an interior tour of the Baldwin house on Reserve Street.



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Recollections of Boonton 1887-1897

ing in back on Mechanic Street, kept fertilizer, cement, and such like. John Myers married one of the partners in the millinery store kept by Miss French.

E. B. Dawson had three children: a daughter, Bess (Elizabeth); a son Raymond, then a well known bicycle rider, who was afterwards a lawyer in Jersey City in partnership with Billy Edwards as Edwards and Dawson; and another son Dudley who was interested in the Green Pond property above Marcella. Ray Dawson, Jim Hopley and others participated in the bicycle rides that were held on holidays and Saturdays at the Witch Grounds (see More About the Witch Grounds) between Josephus Dixon and William Brown's houses at the lower end of Washington Street where all the outdoor celebrations and exhibitions and ball game were held.

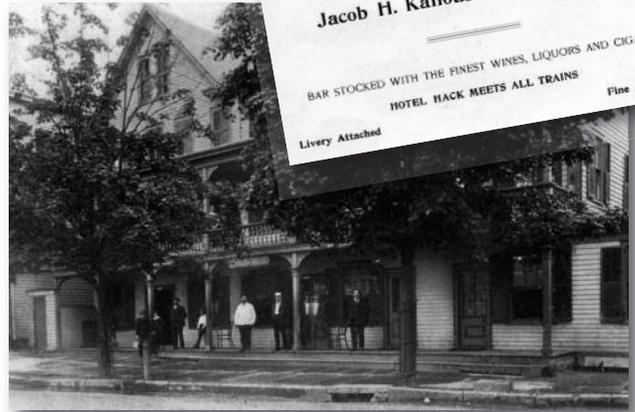
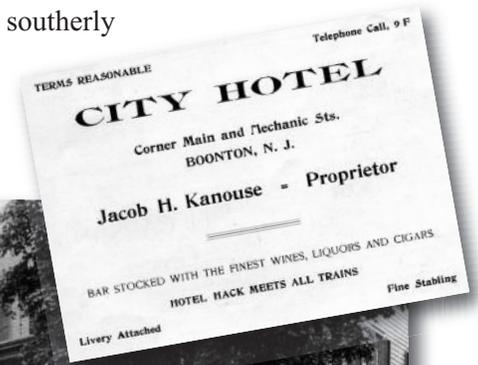
Later, the hardware store of Barton and Looker was opened on the west side of Main Street below the Soldier's Monument in the building later occupied by Scerbo's automobile showroom. Barton and Looker sold much the same things as the Dawson Store, ex-



E. B. Dawson House

HOTELS, SALOONS AND RESTAURANTS

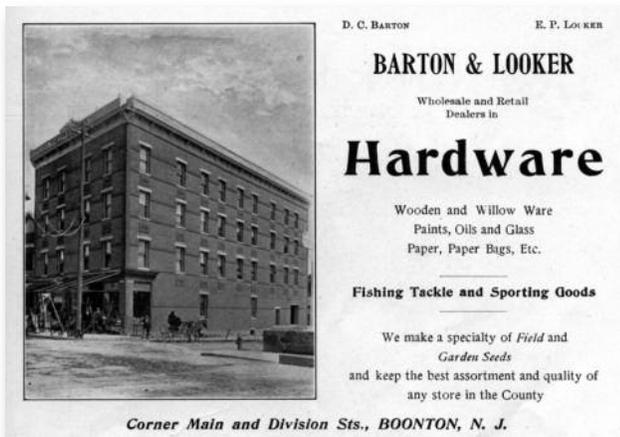
In my time, there were three hotels in town: the Mansion House on the west side of Main Street north of Brook Street (Boonton Avenue), with a kitchen entrance off Brook Street, kept by Denny Bowden with Darb Estler as office manager and a bartender in the saloon. That hotel served rooms and board, and was the only one that did. The Central (City) Hotel at the southerly corner of Main and Mechanic Streets was kept by Jake Kanouse.



The Mansion House

Later Lemuel Kayhart, closed his saloon in Montville and opened another on Mechanic Street about the middle of the block between Main and Spruce Streets. One of his daughters, Lulu, married William Booth and lived on Myrtle Avenue and one of their sons was Dr. W. K. Booth who was a successful practitioner in Boonton. Lem Kayhart had two other daughters, Mamie and Annabell, and two sons Albert and John.

Jim Downey kept a bottling shop and saloon on Brook Street, near Birch Street, and George Estler kept the Park House (Michaelangelo's) at the end of West Main Street, but it was not a hotel, only a saloon. While George conducted a moving and trucking busi-



Corner Main and Division Sts., BOONTON, N. J.

cept the fertilizer, lime and cement. After Edmund Looker died, Clifford Barton worked in the store and, after his father's death, carried on the business for a while.

ness his wife Mary Ann managed the saloon with the aid of a bartender.

The only restaurant in town was kept by Jim Prindle in the Gardner building on the west side of Main Street opposite Brook Street. After selling fish on the "hill" at six o'clock on cold winter mornings, I used to stop at Prindle's restaurant to get warm and (have) a good steak with Lea and Perrins sauce and fried potatoes. Having had nothing to eat since the night before and having worked out in the cold for two or three hours in the morning, those meals tasted very good.

BUTCHER SHOPS

Jake Vreeland kept a shop at the corner of Main Street and Myrtle Avenue where I later worked in the fish and vegetable market. He lived on Myrtle Avenue and ran a butcher wagon about town and the nearby country. He bought his cattle from the farmers in the nearby country and slaughtered them in his slaughter house along the Montville Road alongside the canal below Abe Vreeland's bridge.

Another butcher shop was kept by Abe Kingsland on the corner of the first street up from Brook Street.

Old man Mandeville kept a butcher shop behind his home on Myrtle Avenue but delivered all his meat from a butcher wagon which he, and his son later, operated around town. Later the son had a butcher shop on Main Street, just above Hopkin's Harness Shop.

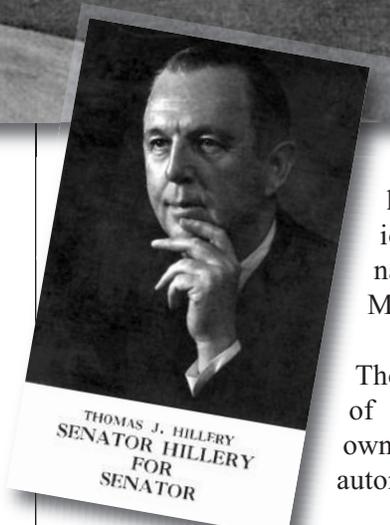
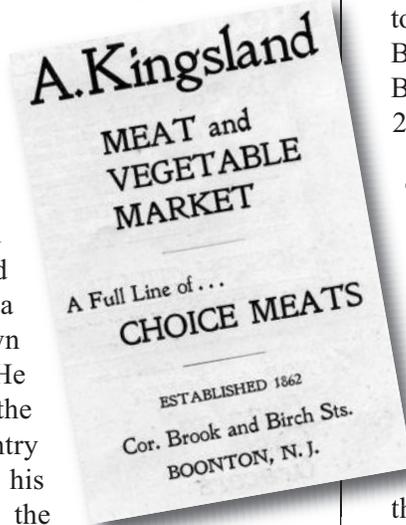
PROMINENT CITIZENS

Thomas J. Hillery came with his father's family from Hibernia, where my father knew him as a "barefoot boy with the seat out of his pants, skipping about the mountains of Hibernia." He was a capable and ambitious young man. He studied law, was admitted to the bar, elected to the House of Assembly, then to the Senate, where he became president of that body

and, consequently, the Acting Governor in the absence of the Governor. In partnership with Jim Beam of Prompton Plains way, he practiced law as Hillery and Beam on the second floor of a building opposite the Maxwell Fire building on Main Street. Jim Beam bought a big house on Vreeland Avenue, opposite where Lathrop Avenue turns south.

Senator Hillery was not only a sound energetic and able man, but he was also active in the affairs of the town. He promoted and established the Boonton Electric Light and Power Company and the trolley line to Morristown, and assisted in the establishment of the Boonton Trust Company. He purchased the Bender Bronze Works (see Gem of the Mountains, Spring 2012) in the hollow which is still operated by his son.

The late Senator Hillery had two sisters, the Hillery Girls, who lived in the French-roofed house at the corner of North Main Street, where it curves towards Powerville, at the corner of the street that leads westerly up the hill to Sunset Lake (see Gem of the Mountains Autumn 2011), which he also owned. He lived in a part stone house which he built on the same property, just south of the old house, with his wife, three sons and a daughter: the present Senator Hillery: Eugene F. Hillery, who lives on Lake Avenue and has his law office in Morristown; Victor, who is associated with the Wall Street



Journal in New York and lives in Madison; and Marion, who married a man named Higgins and lives in Montclair.

Thomas J. Hillery was afraid of automobiles and never owned one, but was killed in an automobile accident in a

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Recollections Of Boonton 1887-1897

friend's car on the way home from
Morristown.

The Wootton family lived in the second block from Main Street on Cornelia Street. They had a son Phillip who for a long time lived in China. He later lived on Reserve Street in the Park until he died. They also had a son Harry and a daughter Sally, who now lives unmarried in the old Wootton house.

I often saw Mr Wootton, who was manager of the Fuller-Lord office, at the entrance to the Iron Works. One of his nephews was John Wootton married one of the Moller daughters and now manages the Boonton Food and Supply Company business at the east end of Division Street.

Incidents that are tragic to some are often humorous to others. In my early days in Boonton, Main Street was unpaved, and ice stuck to the surface, or part of it, whenever freezing rain fell. One place which was dangerous when icy was the section from the railroad bridge at Division Street to Myrtle Avenue. One icy morning I stood in the doorway of the vegetable store at the corner of Myrtle Avenue when I spied an old lady just leaving the railroad bridge on my side of the street. She walked very gingerly on the steep icy sidewalk, her arms full of bundles. Presently, a young man came walking briskly off the bridge, and, without slacking his walk, started down the icy slope. He had gone only a step or two when his feet went out from under him, and, in a position flat on his back he scooted down the hill at a rapid rate with his legs widespread. Soon he overtook the old lady with her bundles. With his legs spread, one of each side of her heels he picked her up like a mail-crane. She say down on his chest and tobogganed down the hill, hanging on to her bundles and screaming bloody murder. When the prostrate man reached the front of our store, his right foot struck a tie post on the curb, and he and the woman went into a dizzy spin on the ice. When the spinning stopped, and the man could make himself heard among the woman's screams, he said to her," madam, you will have to get off - this is as far as I go."



More About The Witch Grounds

“Between Lincoln Street and the Rockaway River, and crossed by the extensions of Dixon and Dawson Avenues, is an area of several acres that for two centuries

has been known as “the Witch Grounds.” When first discovered, it was surrounded by dense forest, but the area itself was absolutely barren and the earth was hard-packed as a “barn floor.” This strange place was regarded with dread and superstition by the early settlers who explained (at least to their children) that this was the place where witches danced.

In the 1890's E. B. Dawson built a ¼ mile track and grandstand near this spot, the oval track being contained in the square formed by Dixon and Dawson Avenues and Lincoln and Forbush Streets. Mr. Dawson's son, Ray, was Captain of the bicycle teams of Columbia University and the New York Athletic Club, and was at one time a national champion bicycle racer. Fireworks displays, medicine shows, carnivals, circuses were afterwards held in the disused racetrack..." *From a guide to a walking tour developed for the 125th anniversary of the First Presbyterian Church in May, 1957. The Text was written by Alex D. Fowler.*

“I wonder if there has been any child who has lived in the vicinity of Boonton, who has not been threatened, at some time, when all other means have failed to make them behave, of being sent to the Witch Ground.” “Located on top of a high bluff to the northwest of Boone-Town was an open level place of an acre or so, surrounded by heavy forest. On this spot no trees grew. There were evidences of many small fires, and stones which had been used for fire places.” “...The Chief (Black Eagle) informed him that it had been for ages the camp ground of the Indians when making the portage past the rapids and falls in the river. They agreed to say nothing of this to any one and other people kept on believing the story.”

From Scouts of 76 by Charles E. Willis, 1923.

Reprinted by Boonton Historical Society, 1976 and on sale in our Gift Shop.

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THE HISTORIC RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT

The Boonton Historical Society featured a walking tour of the Historic Residential District. In 1830 the first skilled ironworkers came from England to work



in the Boonton Iron Works. They were guaranteed free passage to America, generous wages and new homes for their families. This tour includes an external look at some of these homes and a visit to two of the churches they subsequently built. The tour begins outside the Post Office at 501 Main Street, and is conducted by Harold Johnson, retired pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, which will be open for this tour. In addition, St. John's Episcopal Church will also be visited. St. John's boasts some magnificent windows by Tiffany as well as a centennial window, fabricated in England, which depicts the economic life and history of the Town of Boonton.



EXPLORING THE TOWN'S ARTISTIC HERITAGE

By David Henderson

Over the decades, the unusual landscape of Boonton with its quaint architecture and steep hills, has captured the imagination of many artists and writers. In 1833 the great Hudson River painter Asher B. Durand came here to paint "Boonton Falls," while in 1979, in his poem "Garden State," Allen Ginsburg would write, "and Boonton made cannonballs for Washington."

These days the former iron town is fast becoming an artistic center. Boonton is now home to seven art galleries, along with interior designers, architects, photographers, and art studios. Even the recently updated official town website features four new paintings of Grace Lord Park. Images of the park in four seasons will rotate throughout the year.

In May, Boonton Historical Society participated in Main Street's Art Walk. Scenes of Boonton, both old and new, were on display. Images of the Arch Bridge that has been drawn and painted many times by different local artists over the years was shown along with works by local artists David Henderson and the late Russ Conn.

Visitors were welcomed by members in period costume and treated to cookies, wine and cheese as they enjoyed the show.



Art work by Daniel Clark



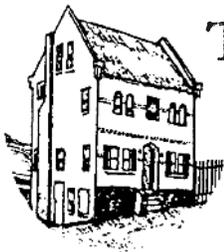
David Henderson and Anne McDonald



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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Phone: (973) 402-8840
Web site: www.boonton.org
E-mail address: Boontnhistory@boonton.org

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

- Andy Barlak Museum Building
- Jennifer Coultas Editor, Gem of the Mountains
- Daniel Clark Exhibit Coordinator
- Jenny Darlington Recording Secretary
- Herb Goldenberg Volunteers
- Candace Grant Social Media
- Claire Hance Corresponding Secretary
- David Henderson Publicity
- Tammie Holloway Gift Shop Manager
- Jayme Januszanis Special Events
- James Kuhnert Graphic Design
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