

Gem of the Mountains

Spring 2015 • Edition 1

The Boonton Historical Society & Museum



Restoration of Birch Street Steps By Monica Scozzafava

The Birch Street Steps were built to allow residents who lived in the “Hill” section of town easy access to the train station and the “Flats” section of town beyond.

Town business publications written in 1897 and 1910* described Boonton as a town desirable to commuters to New York City, because Boonton was just “one hour’s ride on the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad.” A new train station was built in 1904 to replace the station that had been located along Morris Avenue on the outskirts of town. The publications go on to say the new station was “situated ...in the centre of town making it convenient from all directions... Shortly after the completion of the new station, Birch Street, leading from it to the westward, was paved and flagged and otherwise put in good condition. At the same time the old wooden steps connecting with William Street were removed and substantial stone steps, handsome in design, substituted.” The steps continued to be used by commuters through the years.

Commuters were not the only ones to use the steps. Shoppers making the train trip to Paterson used them as well. Also students used them to access the tunnel under the train station and railroad tracks as a short cut to John Hill School and Boonton High School.

Boonton has several areas where its hilly topography was too steep to permit the continuation of the street, so steps were built instead. There are also stairs at the bottom of Cedar Street, Liberty Street, and in several spots between Main and Plane streets. However, none of the other steps are as grand as the Birch Street Steps. These steps are built in three levels. They are double-wide at the uppermost elevation, they divide at right angles into single-wide steps for the middle elevation, and each staircase turns at a right angle again for the bottom section.

Long in disrepair, we are informed that a contract to rebuild the stairs in 2015 has been awarded. The contractor is waiting for the “go ahead” from the Town Engineer to actually start the project which is depicted in the Conceptual Design Layout shown below. Signs posted in the area of the stairs state construction will begin on or about 4/23/15. The contract stipulates construction must be completed in 90 days.

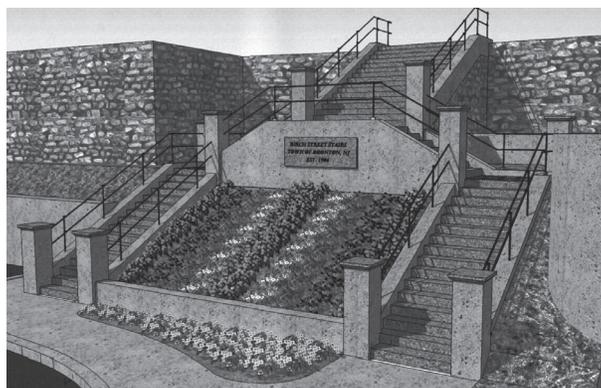
Quotes were taken from:

Picturesque Boonton, Boonton Board of Trade, 1897

Boonton, The Gem of the Mountains, Boonton Business Men’s Association, 1910



Birch Street Steps, Boonton, N. J.
Birch Street steps c. 1900



Conceptual Design for Rebuilt Steps

A 1916 Walk Around The Block ^{Part II}

By Ernie Piscitello

Mechanic Street

Crossing Main St again, on the right, there is an empty lot behind the City Hotel, and then a 2-story building labeled, "hitching".

Telephone 18-B
HORACE FORD

LIVERY MAN

PLAIN STREET
 Near Main
BOONTON, N. J.

Next on Mechanic, at 111, is a 2 story building, the Hotel Boonton, with a "Sal" (saloon?) on the front of the first floor. My mother had told me that this was a "family hotel". I remember the left side of this building being a pool hall and the right side being the shop of Sal the Tailor.

Then, another empty lot, and on the map at 115 A&B Mechanic, a "B & S" (block or brick and stone?), 2 story house with a store front, that my grandfather, Joseph Marcello, and his brother John, and their families moved into about 1910.

My mother, Teresa (1908-2005) was one of Joseph's children. There is a space after 115, which I remember as a driveway.

There was a 1 1/2 story stable at the end of the driveway, where I recall a 2-car garage.

A 3-story building is at 117 and 119. The 117 side is labeled "flour, etc" in front, and behind it a "bake ho" with oven. I think that stood for "bake house". A 2 story stable is behind that.

The 119 side is labeled "grocery". I knew this building as the Creatura Building; it was built by Mr Creatura. I remember the back of 117 being Manfredonia's Italian bread bakery (I can still smell the flour and the fresh-baked, crusty loaves), and 119 as Zangara's grocery. I remember the Lanciano family living above the bakery.

After 119, I remember a driveway, then my grandparents' tennis court, then a garage building I knew as Blanchard's Garage, and an empty lot on the corner with Birch.

Going back to Main St and walking down the left side of Mechanic St, a "hardw" was on the map on the corner. I remember Dawson's Hardware being there.

A blacksmith was at 116, a stable at 118, another blacksmith at 120.

There was a livery stable at 122.

I remember Al Scerbo's body shop being at this location. My mother told me that, as kids, her brothers, Nick and John Marcello, took horses back and forth between the Mechanic St livery and Camp Kenilworth (Tally-Ho) in Powerville for the vacationing

Equitable Life Assurance girls to ride.



HOTEL
BOONTON,
L. KAYHART, Proprietor.

FIRST-CLASS ACCOMODATIONS
FOR TRANSIENTS.

Suppers and meals prepared for small parties at short notice. Bus to and from all trains. Spacious Shed Room and Stables Attached.

1907

A 1916 Walk Around The Block ^{Part II}

IS

JACOB TREDWAY & SON,
Boonton Livery.

FIRST-CLASS RIGS AT MODERATE
PRICES.

Also, Trucking and Moving.

All orders entrusted to us will receive
prompt and careful attention,

PHONE 71-m. 122 MECHANIC ST.
aug. 28,-2m.

property on the corner of Division and Birch, and build a home and a grocery store. Also around 1924, my grandparents will build a building at 132-134 Division St, with 2 stores on the ground floor and 2 apartments on the second floor. In 1934, I will be born in the apartment at 134 Division

My mother operated the Bonnie Beauty Shop on the first floor at 132 Division St from 1939 to 1952.

At 128-130 Division St on the map there is an area marked, "ruins of fire". I remember a Jersey Central Power & Light garage being there.

There was an empty lot at 124-126 Mechanic which led to a blacksmith shop, a wagon shed, a garage, and a "repository". That's how I remember it, but I don't remember the blacksmith shop building being there.

A private home is on the map at 200 Birch St, on the corner, and that's how I remember it.

Birch Street

Walking down Birch St from Mechanic to Division, on the map, there are 4 homes on the left, and an empty field on the right. I remember my grandfather's brother Peter Marcello and his family living at 117 on the corner with Mechanic St, and the MacDonoughs living at 113, the Steinbauers at 107, and the Fowlers at 101, on the corner with Division. I recall my mother saying that Mr MacDonough had owned a blacksmith shop on Mechanic Street.

Division Street

From the corner with Birch St, walking toward Main St, the first house on the right, on the map at 136 Division is on a rectangular lot that reaches about 250 feet, from Division St to Mechanic St, and is about 150 ft wide. The house and property, owned by a Mr Simans, are unchanged from an 1868 map of Boonton. About 1924, my Marcello grandparents will buy the house and a part of the lot at 136 Division with property reaching to Mechanic St. My grandfather's brother John will buy the

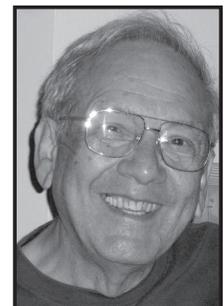
On the map at 126 Division is an auto supply store, and at 124 in the same building, an upholstery shop, with an entrance hallway between them. Behind them is a building marked, "picture show". I remember my mother telling me that a movie house was there, and I remember Nash's Studebaker automobile showroom and garage being there.

There is an empty lot on the map at 122 Division, and at 120 an unidentified building with a stable at the back of the property. Then, another empty lot, leading to a "wagon shed" and stable, and finally the back of the hardware store and grocery on the corner of Main St.

On the other side of the first block of Division St, the 1916 map shows the DL&WRR Station and then buildings at 131 A & B, 127, 119, 115, 113, and 111. The building at 119 has one small stable behind it, and a second, long stable. I remember homes there, with a Mrs Welch living in one of them.

The easiest way for me to tell you how to access the Sanborn website is to tell you to Google "sanborn maps", and choose the heading that has the website address of www.loc.gov/Researchers.

I welcome your comments at eapiscitelo@yahoo.com.



Rick Wendt's Small Town Series

The Puffy Jacket *By Rick Wendt*

The "Puffy Jacket"! Oh, how I hated that Jacket! It always came with mittens attached and that hat! That hat that matted your hair into a none adjustable mess. Why Mothers would want to torture their kids with these things I do not understand? Hard to look cool when you can't even get your arms to stay at your sides... I couldn't even get in a door unless I turned sidewise. Yet every year there it was...

I would come home and the "DREADED SEARS BOX" would be on the living room floor. It always came full of the kind of clothes that the other kids made fun of... the go to Sunday school clothes... all plaid or even worse... **CORDAROY!!!** And that Jacket... always some discontinued style or color that the only reason is on such a drastic sale is because nobody wanted it!!

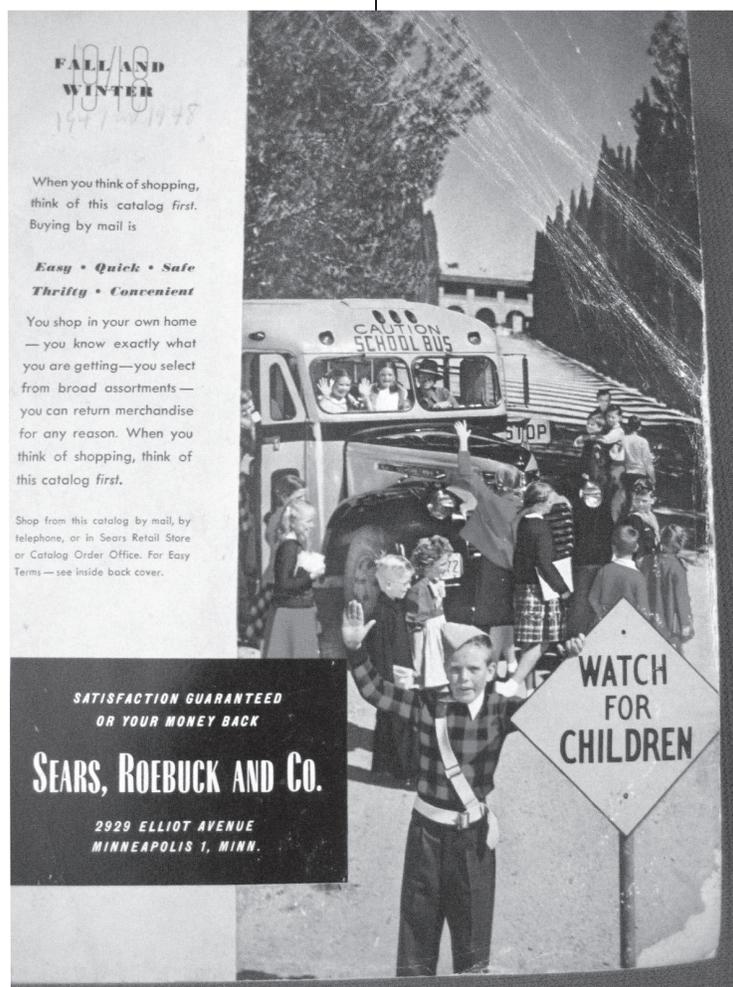
It was bad enough that I had 2 older brothers and got all their hand me downs... but even when I got it new... sighhhh... oh well I digress, I think I know what happened to Roebuck. He is the one that picked out all the ugly clothes for Mothers to torture their sons while going through puberty! It was like, "hey Mom make your son wear this and he will never get a girlfriend"! A plot I tell you a dang Motherhood plot!!! So somewhere along the line Sears just buried him out back. It got so bad at one time I just hid that Sears catalog that comes in the mail... but she would find it... she would always find it... hmmm... makes me think about those Playboys now...

The last one of those Puffy Jackets she got me was a white with gold stripe monstrosity! It was a static electricity nightmare. I swear at night it looked like I was wearing a Tesla-coil! When I would reach out to open a door a

BOLT of red-hot plasma would emanate from my finger rendering me limp for a moment or 2. (Though this was fun when messing with sisters). I would really be a problem when rushing in to use the restroom... but we won't talk about that now. The white on this jacket was so bright the suns reflection would start fires as I walked... (almost not an exaggeration)... And garnered laughs and besmirtchment by most of my peers.

Now the day of its end is still fresh in my mind. I wore it down to the river to skate... hearing giggles and whispers as I slid across the ice. When I noticed a small fire near the edge of the Pond Bridge. As I came closer I saw that this blaze was not a purposeful one but one perhaps cause by an errant cigarette (or the glare from my jacket). I don't know what made me do it but I ripped off my jacket and ran up to and beat the fire back with it. Till I had smothered each dying ember and the inferno was tamed... that is when I noticed that the bright white & gold fire tamer had become a pile of melted nylon clumps with a hint of feathers protruding from its clumpiness...

Well let's just say that my explanation of how I saved the town from sure destruction and saved the honor of the WENDTS firefighting legacy did not go as well as I had anticipated... after getting yelled at and fearing that the dreaded "SPATULA OF DOOM" was coming out I heard Mom say, "See if I waste good money on buying you anything new"... and she left me there to perhaps marinate in the evil I had done... but all I could do was smile... and go get Warren's old coat and go out and play..."Free at last free at last no more puffy jackets free at last"...



The Trolley Runs Through Boonton

1910-1928

By Monica Scozzafava



This brief history of the trolley in Boonton was compiled from the newspaper articles that Arline Dempsey clipped and saved from the Boonton Weekly Bulletins. The words after each date are direct quotes from the articles. The headings are my attempt to add continuity to the article as a whole.

The Traction Company sought permission from the town:

12/14/1905... The Morris County Traction Company... has applied... to the Mayor and Common Council of the Town of Boonton... for its consent and permission to construct, operate and maintain a single track surface street railway to be operated by electricity by means of overhead wires

Some townspeople were for the trolley

01/05/1906... I would like to go on record as an advocate

of the trolley coming to Boonton because it would be a great public improvement and convenience that would not cost the taxpayers of this town one cent.

01/05/1906... There seems to be an impression that the trolley will block the streets like a coal train, but such is not the case, for the cars will be at least one half hour apart and when one passes will take up a little more than a wagon, and then the street will be clear until the next car comes along. The trolley tracks do not obstruct the street in any way whatsoever.

And some townspeople were against it:

01/05/1906... why should a fine macadam road and costly bridges be given for all time to a private corporation for their personal control and gain when such streets and bridges have been constructed from the taxes levied on the property owners?

Continued on next page

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A 1916 Walk Around The Block

The route through town kept changing

1906, The Myrtle Avenue route had been abandoned as the necessary consents could not be obtained from the property owners on the side avenue and also because it was too narrow.

1906... the company's engineers has gone over the Main Street route and did not think it practicable and assigned as their reason for opposing said route that the cost would be greater and that the grade was too great... he did not think the company would build the road in Boonton if they were compelled to accept the Main Street route. (in fact, the route did go up Main Street)

09/09/1909... The trolley will be built to the (train) station by way of Division Street. This street is too narrow, but this seems the only available route.

Finally, the first official trolley car ride took place.

07/07/1910... Mayor Kopp... members of the Common Council, other city officials, the ex-Mayors of the town, representatives of the press and others to the number of forty, (went) on a trolley to Lake Hopatcong and return. On account of the need of increased power ... and delay caused by a car running off the track, slow progress was made going. The party arrived at the Lake at about five o'clock... About an hour and a half was spent on the lake. On the return, excellent time was made, the party arriving at Dover at about eight o'clock..

There was a period of success:

02/05/1920--,,Travel on the trolley is increasing.

07/07/1921--...This trolley has proven a great convenience for Boonton and Mountain Lakes.

But some problems became evident:

03/26/1908--... The company has purchased another large dynamo, which will be placed in the Dover Electric Light Company's plant under the power of one of the large engines, and we learn that possibly a power plant will be located in Hopatcong.

This trolley has proven a great convenience for Boonton and Mountain Lakes.



03/11/1920--... with Morris County Traction Company as the heaviest sufferers with close to \$30,000. Morris County Freeholders expect to pay \$10,000 for snow removal.

In the end, there was failure and dissolution:

08/03/1923--...The Morris trolley is in receivers' hands, it having lost \$7,800 last year. It gives as a cause of failure the competition of the buses. The buses are to do the bulk of local transportation. The holders of trolley stock and bonds are simply unfortunate.

10/15/1929--... Permission to dissolve the Morris County Traction Company and surrender its corporate rights and franchises was granted by the public Utilities Commission...

10/12/1929--... All tracks in the public highways have been removed ...

11/01/1929--...Trolley company should return land to Mountains Lakes...

10/23/1942--... Boonton has approved the removal of the old trolley rails of the defunct Morris County Traction Company on Main Street to contribute 113 tons of historic metal to the scrap drive to aid in the war effort ... to be used in the construction of planes, tanks and guns ...

Remembering A Past President – Arline Fowler Dempsey

We are saddened to announce the passing of one of our past presidents, Arline Fowler Dempsey. Arline was the president of the Boonton Historical Society for ten years from 1976 to 1986. She headed the Boonton Bicentennial Committee and was instrumental in the town's celebration of the bicentennial of our country and our constitution. Arline was a local historian and author with two published books to her credit, "Memories of Morris Canal" and "Old Boonton and the Jersey City Reservoir." She compiled these books using articles she clipped from the Boonton Weekly Bulletin. Arline was also the editor and author of Bridging The Gap, the precursor to the Society's current newsletter The Gem of the Mountains. In 1980, The League of Historical Societies of New Jersey recognized Bridging the Gap with an award for excellence.



Arline Dempsey

Our condolences to Arline's family and many friends.

Visit our Current Exhibit *Feminine Flair* Sundays 1:00-4:00 pm



Gowns, accessories, antique photographs and postcards describe the era of the house and the lady of the house, Mrs. Adelaide Kanouse Taylor.

Membership Application



Boonton Historical
Society and Museum
210 Main Street
Boonton, NJ 07005
Attention: Membership Chairperson

Please make checks payable to the Boonton Historical Society and mail to the address above.

Annual Fees (Renewable in January)

- Individual \$20.00
- Family \$25.00
- Seniors/Students \$15.00
- Business/Professional \$30.00
- Lifetime \$200.00
- Lifetime Couple \$250.00

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The Boonton Historical Society & Museum

210 Main Street, Boonton, NJ 07005

Boonton Historical Society & Museum

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Open on Sundays from 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.
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Opinions expressed here are not necessarily those of the society.