

Millville Moments

MILLVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

March 2024

Website: www.millhistsoc.org

Vol. 3 Issue 1

The Old Bridge House on Main Street

For forty-five years the Old Bridge House stood on the east bank of the Maurice River. If you remember it, you're part of a very small group of long-time residents. Its primary purpose was to protect the operating mechanism that opened the bridge for river traffic and provide shelter for the 24 hours/7 days-per-week bridgetender who would wait for the river traffic that needed to dock upstream. As with many public structures, the bridge house became redundant when the New Jersey Highway Department improved the cross-county highway (State Highway Route 49) that entered Millville from the west. As it still does.



The house was built in 1913 by the Cumberland County Board of Freeholders. The county board was then responsible for the operation of the bridge. The initial operations plan was in place until 1947.

Winfield "Beanie" Parsons was among the early bridgetenders. He lived in the two-room structure, and in the same years that he tended the bridge, he operated a shoe-repair shop in the backroom. Not to be forgotten was Beanie's friend Albert Biggs, who was everywhere Beanie was. Albert sold oysters, fresh and pickled clams, along with a host of other items that "most people" needed every day.

Charles Coulter, a lifetime resident from Cedar Street was the last of the bridgetenders. He held the job for 17 years. Mr. Coulter lived in the bridge house for a few years but was forced to abandon the place due to its rapid deterioration. Later, while standing on the sidewalk to witness the demolition of the house, Charles was asked about living there. His answer was clear; his only bad memory was that kids would often throw stones at the windows and that made it impossible to keep the place warm in winter.

Time ran out on the Old Bridge House in March 1958. Late on Tuesday, March 18, the State Highway Department moved a crane onto the work site and early the next day they began pulling the roof off the building. The roof came off in several pieces which were loaded onto trucks headed to the dump. Then the walls were knocked down – easy work for the crane operator – and hauled away.

Photo by Dale Wettstein.

Millville Historical Society Spring & Summer Events 2024

Save These Dates

April 13 – Annual General Meeting

Reports from 2023, elect trustees for 2024,
"Remembering Rebecca Bacon"
(an exhibit of early 20th century fashion)

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May 18 – Millville History Lecture Series – Part I

Topic and speaker to be announced.

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June 15 – Annual Ice Cream Social

Celebrate the centennial reunion of the
Millville High School Class of 1924
(a slide presentation and lecture)

If your parent or grandparent was a member
of the class of 1924; you win a prize!

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All events are 1 to 4 PM at the
David C. Wood Mansion House
821 Columbia Avenue, Millville, NJ

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Christmas Week 1931

In a tireless search of at least eight minutes, it has been determined that the first-time the kumquat was advertised in the *Millville Daily Republican* was on December 23, 1931. Kumquats appeared in a display advertisement for Kotok Brothers' Millville Market, then at 106 – 112 E. Main Street. The ad was a three-column "Christmas Greeting" and "Thank you" to all their loyal customers. It appeared on Page 4, just under an ad from the Millville Electric Shoe Repairing and Hat Cleaning Company at 409 High, near Vine Street, that was announcing a new pricing schedule.



The Kotok ad announced that the market would be open late on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday that week. In 1931, Christmas was on Friday. The special sale prices for the week included mixed nuts, red ripe cranberries, California Raisins, Sunkist Lemons, Fancy Navel Oranges, and Florida Kumquats.

The prices will surprise you. Bananas were two dozen for 25¢, a peck basket of Golden Delicious Apples was 59¢, and a gallon of Sweet Apple Cider was 29¢. And the Kumquats – they were 19¢ per dozen.

Trustees to be Elected at the Annual Members' Meeting in April

When the annual meeting of the Society is called to order on April 13, one item of business will be the election of trustees. This year we will be voting for seven members. Wendy Pavlics will be nominated to fill a 2026 unexpired term; Anthony Macken will be nominated to fill a 2025 unexpired term; Richard McCarthy, Jane Christy, Edward "Mickey" Smith, and Susan Gainfort will be nominated to new terms that will expire in 2027, and Walda Passaro will be nominated as a new member of the board.

Thank you, Barbara Scudder

When the board of trustees reorganizes in May, it will be without a long-time member, eager volunteer, and good friend. Barbara, you will be missed. Thank you!

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"City Marshal" Charles Biggs

by Mickey Smith

Charles H. Biggs was *City Marshal* of Millville and its first motorcycle policeman. After working in several area glass plants as an apprentice packer, he became Millville's only law enforcement officer in 1907. He served continuously in that position until 1925, when an organizational change was made to the department. Serving as a patrolman and truant officer for three years thereafter, he was appointed Lieutenant in 1928, a rank he held until his retirement on Christmas Eve of 1939 after 33 years of service.



Marshal Biggs patrolled the streets early on with Millville's first motorcycle, a one-cylinder Harley Davidson. The photo here, taken around 1912, shows him with his neighbor Victor Clair at left, his daughter Dorothy, and son Harold.

In anticipation of his departure, and as a sign of how beloved Marshal Biggs was, the city held a number of farewell parties during the 1933 holiday season, including one at the Millville Tax Office. Dr. James Knowles, former Director of Public Safety, released a

statement in which he regretted the end of Lieutenant Biggs' service and lauded him as "an efficient and capable officer" who always worked "faithfully and well" for Millville. In his own letter of resignation, Biggs expressed his "deep personal regret" and "considerable emotion" at leaving, and he emphasized especially "the hundreds of lasting friendships" he had made.

During his tenure, Marshal Biggs played a major role in developing his department from a one-man force to one that embraced a dozen officers, a radio patrol car and a traffic squad. He was also responsible for investigating and solving many crimes. He had a well-earned reputation for his ability to tell vivid tales of both the changes he had seen in the city and the many arrests he had made. He also lived and served during a period in which traffic problems in Millville began; indeed, at the onset of his career, there was not a single automobile in the city. It was Dr. Edward Dare who purchased Millville's first, and who with it, according to Biggs, managed to frighten every horse in Millville.

Marshal Biggs was very involved in Millville's civic affairs, but he never sought higher political office. His focus was always on the betterment of Millville and its residents, and he was especially interested in helping those in need. He constantly solicited funds from the well-off to furnish needy children with shoes so they could attend school.

Biggs lived only a few years after retirement and passed away in April 1942. Services were held at his residence on Broad Street with more than 80 South Jersey police officers in attendance, including members of the State Police. Each officer, according to the obituary, placed an "American Beauty rosebud in the casket as they passed in review." The funeral procession fittingly had a motorcycle escort to Marshal Biggs' final resting place in Greenwood Cemetery.

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Condolences to the Prohowich Family

The Millville Historical Society's Board of Trustees wishes to express our most sincere condolences to our member Theodore F. "Ted" Prohowich, the son of Theodore Prohowich, Sr., who passed away on Sunday, March 3rd, at age 83.



"Ted, Sr." was a life-long resident of Millville and a graduate of Millville High School in the Class of 1959. He served his country as a member of the United States Army from 1963 to 1965. Ted married Barbara Gleeson on November 30, 1968.

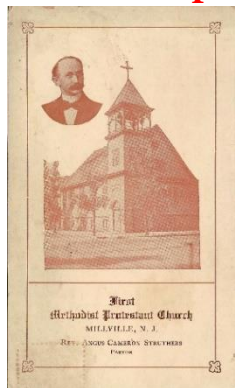
Mr. Prohowich was a longtime employee of the Sheppard Bus Company and an avid motorcycle enthusiast.

In a snapshot, circa 1960, Ted can be seen astride his favorite ride near the corner of 5th and Broad Streets. Clearly seen at the left edge is the Coca-Cola mural on the west side of

Robbins' Market, and beyond North Fifth Street is the Memorial High School. At right can be seen the façade of the "Orange & Blue Hub," every MHS student's favorite lunchtime hangout – half a sub & Coke, 35¢.

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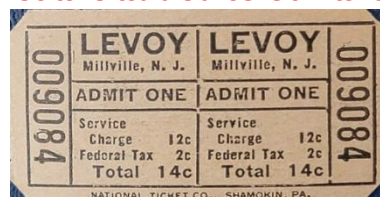
An ancient postcard and an old Levoy ticket are added to our archives.



The Broad Street Methodist Church came to a fiery end on December 22, 2012. Today, there isn't a speck of evidence that the church ever stood on the south-west corner of Third and Broad Streets. The

postcard you see above was printed by the Greenwood Press when the church was new and the Reverend Angus Cameron Struthers was pastor.

Rev. Struthers was the pastor of Mt. Pleasant Church when Broad Street was built in 1913. He moved to Broad Street and stayed for more than a dozen years. He died in Vineland in 1951.



We're stumped; there is no date on this ticket, but we know it was sold before 1954. In 1954 admission was 15¢ and a bag of popcorn was a nickel.



Just for fun, we checked the price at the cinema in the Cumberland Mall for a Saturday night movie ticket. Can you believe it? Today's price is \$16.00!

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E-mail edition – Bonus Pages – A Closer Look Millville High School’s “Orange and Blue” Senior Edition – January 1930

The January 1930 issue of Millville High School’s “Orange and Blue” magazine was 52 pages of school news, pictures and school-fact-filled bios of the 89 graduates, their poems, stories, and even a page of jokes. And, fourteen pages of advertising for everything from Willys-Knight and Chrysler automobiles to washing machines.

In the 1930 school year the Board of Education was still sanctioning two classes of graduates: the first in February and the second in June. Traditionally the February class was always smaller. In 1930 there were 30 graduates in February and 59 in June.

Millville Moments, all these 94 years later, salutes all the graduates and especially the five that have been selected for special recognition: Harold R. Edwards, Rella Simpkins, Katherine Bomhoff, Charles Gant, and Leah Shull.



her 98th birthday in 2011.

Leah Shull. Leah was the youngest daughter of the Ivan and Anna Shull family that lived at 700 E. Mulberry Street. The “Shull Girls,” Evelyn, Mildred, and Leah each became elementary school teachers. Evelyn and Mildred were twins born in 1906; Leah arrived seven years later in 1913. Leah attended college in northern New Jersey and had the good fortune to meet John Allen Choko, the son of Austrian immigrants. They married in July 1934. It is unverified but often suggested that Leah Choko was the longest-lived member of the 1930 class. She passed away a few days after

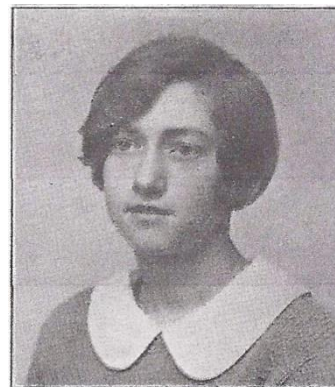


served two terms (1953 & 1955) in the New Jersey state assembly. In 1963, Mr. Gant was named Millville’s Citizen of the Year.

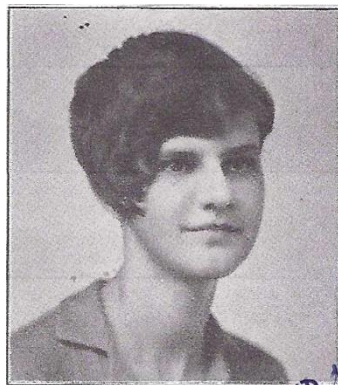
Charles Gant. Ed and Tillie Gant lived at 415 E. Broad Street. Ed was a mechanical genius, who learned on the job in Millville’s many glass factories. They had four sons; Charles was the oldest. After high school Charles worked in a bank to make money that would put him through Rutgers Law School. He returned to Millville in 1940 and opened a private law practice on High Street. Charles interrupted his law career to serve as a private with the U.S. Army’s combat engineers during World War II. After the war Charles returned to Millville to continue his law practice and public service. He

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Katherine Elizabeth Bomhoff. On a sunny Thursday morning in June 1933, “Katrink” Bomhoff was among the 91 graduates at Glassboro Normal School’s 10th anniversary class. It was one of the earliest classes required to complete three years of training to obtain a teaching license in New Jersey. (Five others in the GNS class of 1933 were also Millville High graduates.) Katherine’s nickname was foisted on her when she became the class treasurer. After Normal School graduation, Katherine began her career and she stayed with it for 43 years; thirty-one of those years were at the R. D. Wood School on Archer Street. Miss Bomhoff teaching years were filled with dozens of other responsibilities, one of which was serving as President of the Millville Education Association.



Harold R. Edwards. The vast majority – perhaps thousands – of Millville men and women who wanted to own a Pontiac bought their cars from the H. B. Edwards Agency. In 1923 when Harold was ten years old, his parents, Horace and Alice Mae, moved from Seely, New Jersey, to Millville and opened an automobile dealership on Vine Street where Horace sold Willys-Knight and Chrysler cars. The dealership moved in the early 1940s to South Second Street to a small showroom and office on the east side of the street. After Horace’s successful negotiations with the city of Millville for the sale of property on the west side of South Second Street, a new Pontiac facility and gas station were built. The business moved across the street. Harold was a highly respected high school student. He was affectionately dubbed “H.R.” and served his classmates as a sports team manager and vice-president of their senior class.



Rella Simpkins. It is possible that we will never know what it would be like to have a unique given name. Rella’s parents, Richard and Carrie Simpkins had ordinary names and so did Rella’s brother William and her sisters Helen and Julia. Rella was a “little” girl, not young, but small; her size is mentioned in her yearbook bio. She was a very attractive young miss who was full of mischief and fun. Her friends claimed this to be true because of the impish glints seen in her eyes. Rella loved children but had none of her own. She graduated from Glassboro Normal School in the class of 1932 and immediately started her teaching career that began and ended at the R. D. Wood School. She married Charles “Chick” Dian in 1941. Her passing at age 87 left the world with one less smile.

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Rella Dian was a beautiful person and a great teacher. She encouraged her students to reach for the stars. Some of her own achievements were writing essays, creative short stories, and reports. The following is a sample of her writing that appeared in the 1930 Senior Edition of the *Orange and Blue* – Millville High School’s magazine.

The Professor’s Pupil

By Rella Simpkins

Professor Stokes was the teacher of botany in Sierra High School. He was the most - peculiar looking man that the pupils had ever seen. He was very tall and lanky with most noticeable large eyes shaded by dark glasses. One day a very strange thing happened.

One of Professor Stokes’ pupils had disappeared. What had happened to him? Had he been kidnapped? That was the kind of question that the villagers were asking each other. The newspapers were filled with the story of the strange disappearance. The authorities and officials of the small town were doing everything they could, but all seemed useless.

After two months the eccentric case was no longer talked about, and the poor bereaved teacher returned, once more, to the teaching of his class. The students couldn’t understand Professor Stokes any longer; they couldn’t understand why the case had made such an impression upon him.

Days dragged along as usual for a few months more. One day the scholars noticed that the Professor was himself once again. What had happened to bring about this most wonderful change? The story finally came out.

One day, Professor Stokes, absentmindedly dashing soap about as he shaved before the bathroom mirror, examined the stand to see what havoc he was making and was struck with curiosity. In a small corner of the wash stand, he saw a small shining black object – to be exact, an object about the size of a large pinhead. Suddenly this small object began to laugh, and it yelled with all its might, “Hello, Professor Stokes!”

You can’t imagine how surprised Stokes was. He ran swiftly to his room and returned with a magnifying glass, for he thought that he had discovered something that no one had ever seen before. Holding the glass over the little speck, he saw that it possessed two tiny legs. To his astonishment, it began to run around and around the bottom of the wash stand, yelling now and then for the Professor to catch him. Poor Professor Stokes didn’t know what to do, for he was unable to catch the frisky little speck. Finally, after running around the circle for fifteen minutes, it gave out the most heart-rending cry, for, do you know what had happened? I don’t believe you would ever be able to guess, but I

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will no longer keep you in suspense. This little two-legged creature had fallen and broken both of its legs. Professor Stokes had seized him immediately.

He carried it carefully to his room and bandaged its two broken legs. The poor little fellow wailed and wailed, because it had to lie in a small bed made from a pasteboard box, for six long weeks. Now, why should that make the Professor so happy?

At the end of three weeks, the small creature asked the Professor to listen to its story. The Professor readily consented, and this is the story —

“I grew tired of living in my glass enclosure, and I wanted to see the world, so when you were washing the glass, I decided to jump out and run away. That I did.

“I had quite a lovely adventure and I read in the papers about my disappearance. Gee, how funny that seemed. I had to laugh the most over it.

“After roaming around for several months, I began to grow tired of my new life, so I thought that I would return home. When I was running around in the wash stand, I didn’t expect to break my legs, but now that I have told you my story, I think I can stay here for three more weeks.”

The Professor sighed, “What a relief!” At the end of three weeks, the small legs were knitted together, and with a leap, the small spot jumped back into the Professor’s eye. His pupil had returned.

Of course, Professor Stokes never told his students the real truth about his pupil, for what a ridiculous story that would be to publish in the papers.

Things You Should Know

The Millville Historical Society Library will be open this spring on Sundays and Wednesdays, from 1 to 4 PM. Call (856) 293-1078 for an appointment if you need help with your genealogical research.

The Society’s 2024 events calendar now appears on the Society’s website:
www.millhistsoc.org.

The Nominations Committee has presented a slate of seven to be elected at the April 13th Annual Member’s Meeting. Please attend and vote.

Watch the website for news and announcements.