



Historical Society of Stillwater Township Newsletter

www.HistoricStillwater.org

August / September, 2009

From the President's Desk

Dennis Pegg, Acting President

The summer is half over and I hope you have been enjoying it, despite the weather. Luckily, we had a perfect day for our Strawberry Festival on June 14. This year, the Strawberry Festival was combined with Stillwater Day. With Stillwater Day, a fundraiser by the Stillwater Presbyterian Church and the Strawberry Festival all running simultaneously, we enjoyed lots of traffic for our event. In fact, we raised more funds than any prior Strawberry Festival on record. I hope you managed to attend and our sincere thanks to those who volunteered to make the event a success.

We have the Peach Festival coming up on August 16 from 1 to 4 p.m. It should be a great way for families to spend some time together. We hope to see you there.

The Museum has been open on Sundays since June and we have been getting a small, but steady, stream of visitors. Some have been related to early Stillwater settlers and have traveled quite a distance to conduct family research. For volunteers staffing the Museum, it has really been rewarding helping the visitors find the information they are seeking. Plus, it is a lot of fun to learn family information from the visitors as well. Please contact Carolyn Celli at 973-383-3094 if you would like to staff the Museum on a Sunday afternoon.

Bob Craig from the NJ Historic Preservation office confirmed that, on June 3, the Grist Mill complex was listed on the New Jersey Register of Historic Places. Many thanks to Lou Sylvester and Roy Knutsen for their work on this project. Additionally, Bob's office has submitted the complex for consideration for designation as a national historic site. We will keep you updated as the national designation progresses.

We have an upcoming meeting on August 13 at the Museum at 7:30 p.m. Several new members have joined HSST recently thanks to the membership drive. We encourage new and old members alike to attend our meetings. No need to be shy!

Special Features in this Issue:

Oral History Corner: Interview with
Gus Roof

Strawberry Festival Report and Photos

Finally, our continued thanks to Alan Westra at Meadowbrook Landscaping for volunteering to take care of the Museum's lawn this summer. If you have been past the Museum recently, I'm sure you will agree that Alan and his team are doing a great job.

New Members

Our membership drive is working! HSST welcomes the following new members:

Virginia & Eli Layton, Willingboro, NJ
Mr. & Mrs. John P. White, Shallow Brook Farm, Stillwater, NJ
Allison & Alan Westra, Stillwater, NJ
Kathleen Bikoff, Stillwater, NJ
Jill & Ronald Thoenig, Stillwater, NJ

Congratulations!

Congratulations to Rob Jacoby on his recent graduation from Goucher College with a Master of Arts in Historic Preservation. Rob has already contributed in a big way to HSST and will surely do so in the future. The Oral History project is just one example of Rob's work for the Historical Society. We're very lucky to have someone like Rob lending his expertise to HSST.

Educational Opportunity

Drew University recently published the class schedule for its Historic Preservation Certificate program for the 2009/2010 academic year. One course that may be of particular interest to our members is the New Jersey Architectural Walking Tour of Newton, a one-day course offered on September 26. Check out the Drew website at www.drew.edu/cue/preservation.aspx for more information on this course and on Drew's other Historic Preservation course offerings.

E-Mail Addresses, Please!

If you have not done so already, please send your e-mail address to Maureen Block at waymaur@embarqmail.com. We can save money by delivering the newsletter and other notices via e-mail. For those still receiving the newsletter via snail mail, please note that we have a color version of the newsletter available for download on our website at www.HistoricStillwater.org.

Historical Society of Stillwater Township

PO Box 238
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Stillwater, New Jersey, 07875

Board of Directors

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Grist Mill Committee:
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Bob Grabowsky, 973-903-3244
Dennis Pegg, 973-383-1057

*Meetings are held on the 2nd Thursday
of every month at 7:30 p.m.*

Museum House & Grounds:
Bob Grabowsky, 973-903-3244

*The museum is open June through Sep-
tember every Sunday from 2 to 4 p.m.*

Oral History Corner

Featuring Gus Roof with insight from his wife, Elsie Roof

Interview conducted by Rob Jacoby with the assistance of Jan Wiley, June 21, 2008

As many HSST members know, Gus Roof was one of the founding members of the Historical Society of Stillwater Township. He devoted several decades of service to HSST and we are very grateful for his work. Unfortunately, Gus passed away on October 27, 2008. We were very fortunate to have an opportunity to interview Gus prior to his passing. Below are some highlights from that interview.



Photograph by Rob Jacoby

The Roof family has lived on the historic Casper Shafer farm for four generations. Gus was born there on August 13, 1917. He lived on the farm on and off throughout his life and, continually, from 1946 until his death last year.

Gus' earliest memory is of the barn burning down in 1919. Gus remembered being in his mother's arms, watching the flames. Gus' father rebuilt the barn with the help of Roy Rosenkrans, a carpenter who lived across the road. The barn currently on the property is the third one in Gus' memory. The other two also burned down.

There was no electricity in Stillwater in those days. Electricity did not reach Stillwater until Gus was in elementary school. The house was heated by coal in the living room wood stove. The house did not have an indoor bathroom until the mid-1940s.

Town residents bought ice which came from Bonny Brook. It would last almost all summer. One especially cold winter, the ice was 20 inches deep. Gus remembered snowplows being pulled by horses. The first person in the area with a car was Dr. Landis. Gus' father got a car in about 1923, though Gus remembered going to Newton to shop via horse and buggy.

Gus' father had attended elementary school in the current Museum. By the time Gus attended school, the school was a one-room schoolhouse on Maple Avenue two doors down from the Museum. About 30 children of all elementary grades were taught there by one teacher. The teacher, Dr. Dallan, was also a minister and a justice of the peace. Gus attended high school in Newton.

Gus remembered doing chores around the farm from the time he was quite young. His chores included getting the eggs, taking care of the chickens, feeding the calves and similar chores. When Gus was young, the farm had a hired man named Maynard (Boots) Kitchen. Boots boarded in the Roof home. Later, after he graduated from high school, Gus became the hired man.

During the war, Gus' brother, Carl served overseas in England. Carl met an English woman whom he married and brought back to the States. In the meantime, Gus had to stay at home to keep the farm going.

Elsie and Gus met in Stillwater. Although Elsie was born overseas, she grew up in Brooklyn. She spent summers with her aunt, cousin and brother in Stillwater. Elsie would attend ball games with her local

friend, Jeannette Nelson. Gus was a pitcher. But it was roller-skating that eventually brought Elsie and Gus together. They were married in 1942.

Phones had come to Stillwater even before electricity, but individual houses didn't always have them. Elsie remembers being in labor and Gus having to go to the store to call the local doctor. Later, the Roofs had a crank phone and used it as part of a party line. Elsie remembers having a similar number to Elsie Roy on the party line. It made for quite a few mix-ups where the caller got the "wrong" Elsie and didn't realize it until far along in the conversation!

The Roof farm was primarily a dairy farm in the early days. The Roofs also grew hay, plus corn and wheat for the chickens. They usually had about 25 or 30 cows and produced about 200 quarts of milk per day. Originally, Gus' family had Holsteins but, due to illness, they replaced them with Hershires. There were dairy farms throughout the area at that time. Today, there is only one dairy farm remaining in Stillwater.

Life on a dairy farm was especially hard work. The Roofs always had to be home to milk the cows. It took a couple of hours each day. There was not much time for socializing, attending Church picnics and so on. The Roofs turned to boarding horses. It represented a better income for less work. Eventually, the Roof farm became a beef farm with Red Angus cows. It also has about chickens (Rhode Island Reds) and a few dozen eggs are produced each day. Gus and Elsie's son Leon and his children take care of the cows and the chickens. Ed Chamblings handles the hay.

In the early 1970s, Gus and Elsie Roof, along with Willard and Jeannette Klem, owned and operated the Stillwater Grist Mill, offering tours of the operating mill and family entertainment on the grounds. The Roofs and the Klems were the last owners to operate the historic mill.

On that note, we conclude the highlights of Gus Roof's interview. The entire interview is available for review at the Museum. Next issue, we will feature an interview with Lawrence Earl.

Do you know someone whom we should be interviewing as part of our Oral History project? If so, please contact Rob Jacoby at 973-579-7245.

Booklets featuring the complete interview with Gus Roof are available for \$10 for members and \$15 for non-members. Please submit requests, along with \$2 for postage/handling, to: Historical Society of Stillwater Township, Attn: Gus Roof Oral History, PO Box 238, Stillwater, NJ 07875

Did you know.....

- that the Historical Society of Stillwater Township conducts genealogical research upon request?
- that the HSST website has links to other sources of historical and genealogical information?
- that the HSST website features a daily list of anniversaries of historical events?
- that the HSST website has books and other Stillwater memorabilia available for sale?

Please check out our website at www.HistoricStillwater.org for details!

Strawberry Festival 2009

We had a record-breaking Strawberry Festival on June 14 thanks to the combination of the Festival with other events in Stillwater. HSST offered freshly picked strawberries in a delicious strawberry shortcake with ice cream.

Our four gracious waitresses, Sarah Meyer, Payden Dorney, Emily McCatharn and Grace Seaman were busy all afternoon rushing strawberry shortcake from the kitchen to our guests, who were seated at tables in the Museum and outside on the patio and lawn. The HSST volunteers in the kitchen filled plate after plate until we completely sold out about 30 minutes before the end of the event.

HSST also had a bake sale set up on the Museum lawn and lots of local folks took home freshly-baked desserts to enjoy later that evening.

Thank you to all who volunteered to make this such a success. We hope to repeat the success on Sunday, August 16 at the Peach Festival. All are invited!



Enjoying the beautiful weather!



A good chance to meet and greet the neighbors.



Keeping the strawberries coming!



Miss Stillwater, Anne Abruzzo, stops by for a visit.



Nothing beats strawberry shortcake al fresco.



Sarah and Payden take a short break.

Strawberry Festival photographs by Bill Lambert

Dues Remittance / Donation Form

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Annual Dues:	Student \$10 \$20	Lifetime Membership:	\$300 Individual/Family Individual
	Family \$30	Donation:	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25 <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 <input type="checkbox"/> Other \$_____

Tear off and mail with check to: Historical Society of Stillwater Township
 PO Box 238
 900 Main Street
 Stillwater, NJ 07875

The Historical Society of Stillwater Township is an IRS recognized 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Donations to HSST are tax deductible. Ask your accountant or tax preparer for details.

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