

**TRENTON HISTORICAL
SOCIETY
ANNUAL REPORT 2002**

The Trenton Historical Society (THS) was founded in 1919. For the entirety of its existence the society has sought to educate its members and the general public about the rich heritage of our capital city. We are a membership organization governed by a Board of Trustees from among whom officers are selected, a New Jersey Non-Profit Corporation, and have a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. This annual report reflects our activities during the 2002 calendar year.

PROGRAMS

Over the years, the principal method of fulfilling the Trenton Historical Society's core educational mission has been our lecture series. Our program chair, Mary Alice Quigley arranged three programs for 2002. The Annual Meeting started off the year on January 6th with a presentation by Mark E. Lender, PhD. He spoke on "George Washington's Military Reputation Reconsidered," commemorating the 225th anniversary of the Battles of Trenton. On May 19th, as part of the national celebration of Preservation Week, Annabelle Radcliffe-Trenner presented "Do's and Don'ts of Caring for an Older House." This program combined practical tips on vintage home repair with insights into the science behind preservation. For the fall meeting Richard Hunter was enlisted to inform us about, "Trenton's Other Canal: The Water Power." Drawing on his extensive research of the area prompted by excavations along Route 29 and the new hotel site, Mr. Hunter illuminated a now almost vanished landmark that played a major role in the city's 19th century industrial development.



THS president David Collier introducing Richard Hunter

PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

A major focus of the THS in 2002 was preserving our threatened heritage assets. The number and scope of tasks confronting this committee required the formation of four separate 'working groups':

Endangered Buildings Working Group

Throughout the year, this group has been busy surveying and compiling an extensive list of buildings throughout the City. All these buildings are significant to the history or architectural history of Trenton and are threatened or endangered in some form. The buildings were compiled into a database and given a ranking for being the most endangered. In the future, a list of the Top 10 most endangered will be released in hopes of raising public awareness.

Resources Working Group

In the spring, the Resources Working Group sponsored a membership drive on behalf of the entire Historical Society. Letters were sent to the existing THS mailing list, as well as mailing lists shared by other community organizations. As a result, approximately 150 new and renewing members submitted annual dues and donations totaling \$3,500.

In August, the group sponsored its first fundraising event, the “Cool Off at the Car Wash” cocktail party. The event was held at the AutoValet Car Wash, which is located in the old trolley barn on Lalor Street. Approximately 50 paid guests enjoyed cocktails, appetizers, and tours of the assisted living facility in the old Stokely-Van Camp factory building.



Attendees listen to a speaker at the Car Wash Fundraiser

Projects Working Group

Pilot Project

As is common in many of New Jersey’s urban areas, Trenton has many vacant and deteriorating buildings. However, the building stock of Trenton is still incredible and the historic neighborhoods are basically intact. Working closely with the City of Trenton, the Trenton Preservation Committee (TPC) has embarked on a sojourn to preserve, stabilize and reuse vacant, city-owned properties that were threatened with demolition. Still in its beginning phases, this program ultimately take current deteriorating buildings, save them from demolition, put them back on the tax rolls and enhance Trenton’s image while saving many valuable buildings.

Each building was looked at very closely under a number of criteria and after discussions between the TPC and the City seven were chosen for further evaluation. The next step in the process was to engage a structural engineer to visit each building and make a professional evaluation of the building’s structure and potential for re-use. Upon completion of this step, sound buildings will be stabilized and discussions among the TPC, City, and civic and neighborhood organizations will occur to develop a marketing plan with the eventual re-use of the buildings.

South Trenton Nomination

The other major, ongoing project of the Preservation Committee has been the undertaking of a New Jersey and National Register nomination for a portion of south Trenton. Several volunteers

spent many hours photographing the buildings to aid in the nomination process. In addition, training sessions were conducted to instruct volunteers in preparing brief descriptions of buildings that will be used in the nomination.

Public Relations Working Group

The highlight of this group's activities for the year was the Candidate's Night held in April. Candidates running for mayor and city council were invited to a forum to discuss preservation issues in Trenton prior to the general election in May. All but one of the candidates attended the forum, and a sizeable crowd enjoyed the event at the Conduit.

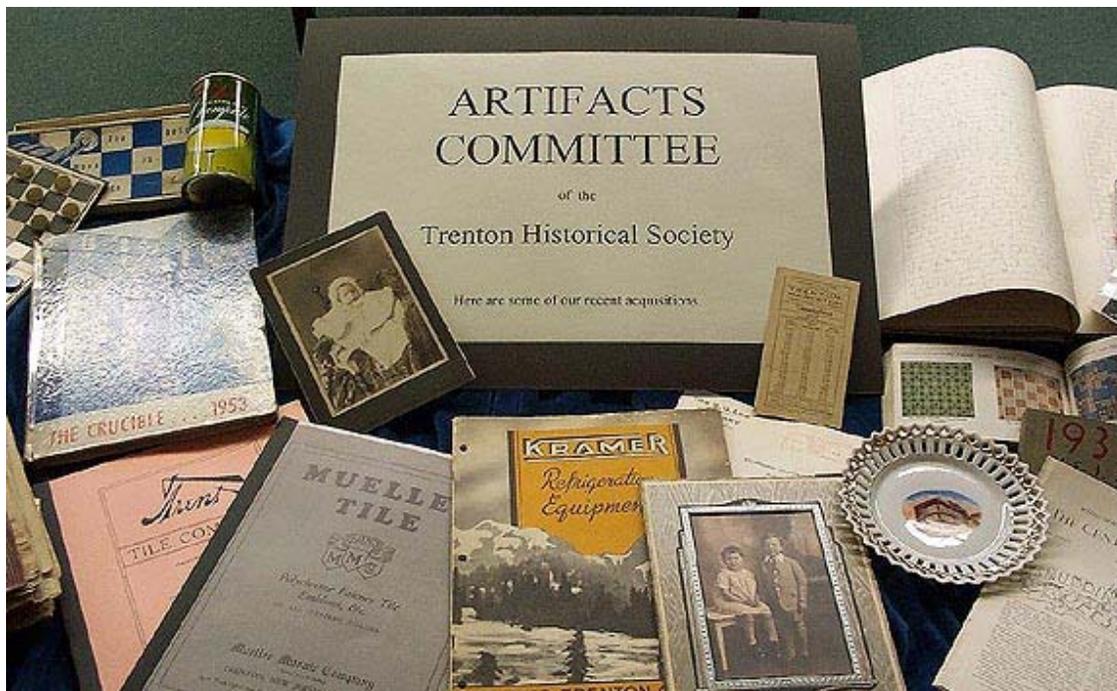


Candidates for Council-at-Large at Forum on Preservation and Economic Development

In conjunction with the Resources Working Group, the Public Relations Working Group also planned a public meeting in November regarding Trenton's preservation plan. City preservation planner Jerome Harcar and consultant Susanne Hand presented the findings and recommendations to a full house at Thomas Edison State College. The event raised awareness of the city's goals and priorities for preservation.

ARTIFACTS COMMITTEE

In the spring of 2002, the Trenton Historical Society formed a new group; the Artifacts Committee was created by a May vote of the Board of Trustees and charged with identifying and acquiring items relevant to Trenton's past. While anything related to the city is potentially of interest, six areas of focus were specified: schools (yearbooks, newspapers), industries & businesses (catalogs, records), middle/working-class families (photos, letters), ethnic groups (social & religious group records), city neighborhoods (civic association information), and the Douglass House. The repository for items we obtain is the Trentoniana Collection of the Trenton Public Library.



What We've Saved

Since its inception the Artifacts Committee has acquired 133 items or groups of items. Most of our acquisitions are single items, but we have also obtained some collections, such as a series of photographs illustrating World War II production at the GM plant or the funeral prayer card collection of a former pastor of St. James Church. Our principal focus was on documents: school yearbooks (19), industrial catalogs (18), handwritten letters (9), and various other paper items, such as school newspapers, pamphlets, legal documents, etc. Of the remainder, 29 items were individual or small collections of photographs and 6 items were objects such as badges or bottles. The sources were evenly split; 67 were purchases, all but one of which was from Ebay, the internet auction site and 66 items were gifts, principally from committee members such as Brian Murphy who donated items from our private collections. While our preference is the original item, in 13 cases we had to settle for copies. We have obtained a very diverse group of things which would have remained in private hands, but are now available for use by researchers and the general public in the Trentoniana Room.

How we're paying for it

To finance our purchases the Board of Trustees authorized the creation of a separate Artifacts fund and appropriated \$1,000 from the general funds of the Society. To replenish the Artifacts Fund, we have started offering research services for a fee, such as providing copies of Trenton obituaries, tax records/photos, vital statistics (birth, death & marriage certificates) and yearbook photos and searching Trenton City Directories. From 77 separate requests we earned \$1,095 and provided researchers from around the country with 135 obituaries, 14 tax records/photos, 16 vital record certificates, 1 yearbook photo, 16 directory searches, and 8 other searches. The success of the research services is due in large part to two factors, the Trenton Historical Society website (www.trentonhistory.org) and College of New Jersey interns.

We're reaching out

In addition to the website, the Artifacts committee has been spreading its message through flyers sent out with the summer membership mailing and distributed at local events. In August, the committee was the subject of a newspaper column by Mea Kaemmerlin that appeared on the first page of the Trenton Times Living section. Speaking engagements at the Rowan Towers Apartments and Ewing Township Live Wires Club have gotten the word out to area seniors. In 2003, we reached out to collectors through an appearance at the Washington Crossing Postcard Collector's Club.

OUTREACH

Attracting wider interest, using new resources

At the end of 2001, the Trenton Historical Society launched its website. Throughout 2002 we've been adding new information about the Society and Trenton. This has prompted greater numbers of visitors, 27 visits per month to the site in January swelled to 838 by December. The site, which is divided into three main pages, Preserve, Explore and Inform, was accessed frequently by people looking into our research services (1,218 visits in 2002). Other popular destinations were pages on High School Yearbooks, which contains some class listings (1,649 visits), Trenton's Historic Districts (942), and the on-line version of the 1929 History of Trenton (900).



Our website's homepage

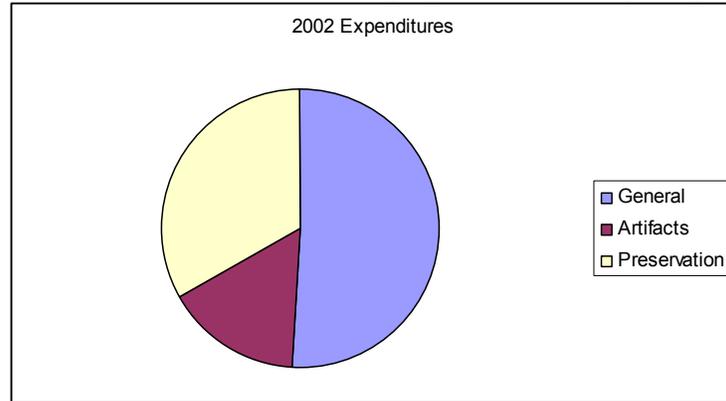
The website benefited from the contributions of volunteers and in particular the work of interns from the History Department of the College of New Jersey. The intern program started in the Spring semester with two participants, Bonnie & Meghann, who among other things added to the pages of the 1929 History and created the Historic District's pages. In the Fall, three new recruits (Cassie, Chris & Dan) continued transcribing the diaries of prominent Trentonian, Edmund Hill and indexing Trenton obituaries from the 1920's. In addition to adding to the website, interns filled numerous research requests. For Spring 2003, a new student, Marcus, has signed up to intern with the Society.

Our presence on the internet has also resulted in an influx of new inquires about Trenton and its history. Dozens of emails were received and answered on subjects ranging to historic city neighborhoods to items manufactured by Trenton industries. By far the most frequently-asked questions dealt with family history.

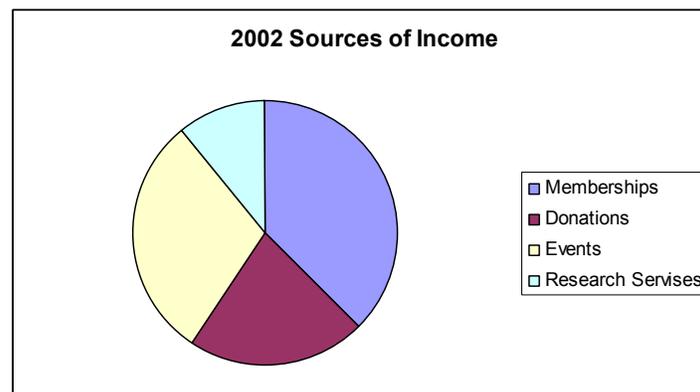
SOCIETY FINANCES

No organization can run without money to fuel its various activities. In 2002, the Trenton Historical Society spent \$7,725 and took in \$10,031, with funds divided into three main categories, General, Preservation and Artifacts. The General category included everything not covered by one of the two main committees, Preservation and Artifacts. Among the major items under General were all educational program activities, membership, and operating expenses for THS, accounting for slightly more than half our expenditures.

With slightly more than \$2,500 in expenses the Preservation Committee employed its funds to present several important events, as well as supporting its regular operations. The Artifacts Committee spent all its money on the purchase of Trenton-related items.



Fortunately, thanks in large part to the generosity of our members, we ended 2002 with a balance that was roughly \$2,000 higher than our starting figure. Membership dues at \$3,750 were supplemented by donations of slightly less than \$2,200, proceeds from events of just under \$3,000 and research services of \$1,100. Leaving us with a year end balance of \$10,880.



SOCIETY LEADERSHIP

A Board of Trustees elected at our annual meeting by the membership governs the Trenton Historical Society. In 2002, the Board consisted of David Collier, Michael Olszak, Wendy Nardi, Gary Nigh, Arthur S. Forman, Beth Feltus, Frances Myers-O'Brien, John Hatch, AIA, George H. Pearson, AIA, Jerome Harcar, Beth Briegel, Peter Kasabach, and Margaret "Peg" Zimmerman, CPA. Among this group were two architects, two academics and other concerned citizens who brought diverse talents to the THS. Long time board members, David Collier,

President; Michael Olszak, Vice-President; and Arthur Forman, Treasurer were joined by new board members, Wendy Nardi, Recording Secretary and Gary Nigh, Corresponding Secretary as officers for the year. As the year ended a new status of Trustee Emeritus was created; Beth Briegel, Frances Myers-O'Brien, George H. Pearson, "Peg" Zimmerman were elevated to this status as well as ex-board members, William Beitel, Elizabeth Hagedorn, and "Zip" Zimmerman. Two new members joined the Board in 2003, Sally Lane, noted authority on local history and Sara Andre, an expert on preservation matters.

As we look back at the activities of the Society in 2002, our core mission of preserving and revealing Trenton's incredible history and heritage assets informs our planning for today and tomorrow:

GOALS for 2003 and beyond:

- Release 'Top Ten' List of endangered buildings and continue updating database;
- Secure a grant source and hire consultant for South Trenton District nomination;
- Increase public awareness of preservation issues in Trenton;
- Educate public officials about the advantages of preservation in the city's revitalization efforts;
- Promote city neighborhoods through tours and other activities;
- Have all structures in Pilot Project assessed by structural engineer;
- Working with City and other organizations, stabilize one building from Pilot Project;
- Continue acquiring Trenton Artifacts;
- Update website with inclusion of more data and multimedia content.

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