

Gem of the Mountains

Fall 2016 • Edition 2

The Boonton Historical Society & Museum



Boonton Opera House.

By Jennifer M. Coultas

In the days of vaudeville and silent movies Boonton's Main Street theatres welcomed such luminaries as Laurel and Hardy, Burns and Allen and a host of vaudeville acts and characters now faded from memory. Prominent among the outstanding theatrical venues was the Boonton Opera House.

Now undergoing a significant renovation, the Boonton Opera House has been hiding in plain sight on Main Street for many

years. Originally a two story building erected in 1840, it later became known as Independence Hall and was used for meetings of the Temperance Society and the Boonton National Guard. The third floor was added in 1890 and on Thursday, November 20, 1890, the new Boonton Opera House opened its doors to much fanfare. The first floor housed several retail stores while the upper two floors housed the auditorium of the Opera House.

The announcement of the grand opening proclaimed electric lighting, a balcony, 19 foot ceilings, and a seating capacity of 600. In addition to theatrical groups, numerous



Boonton Opera House 1890
Postcard: Boonton Historical Society



Boonton Weekly Bulletin July 18, 1902

clubs, societies, and churches were invited to avail themselves of the theatre for "all proper purposes." For an 1895 performance of Ghosts or Popular Shades, general admission was 35 cents with reserved seating at 50 cents. Discounted pricing included five reserved seats for \$2.00, three admissions for \$1.00 and ten admission tickets (without seats) for \$2.50.

Around 1910 the Boonton Opera House was converted to a movie theatre, the Bijou. Tickets cost a dime for adults and a nickel for children. Harry Cone the new proprietor of the Bijou was quoted as saying in the September 12, 1912 issue of the Boonton Weekly Bulletin that he "promises a good program, with nothing that will offend the most refined tastes." There were no concession stands in those days and the cost of admission included a five reel feature, a two reel comedy and perhaps a newsreel. One local resident at the time recalls meeting Pearl White, Maurice Costello and Francis X. Bushman in person.



Boonton Weekly Bulletin
August 22, 1912

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The Boonton Historical Society & Museum

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Boonton Opera House.

When George Burns came to Boonton, reportedly for one of his first performances with Gracie Allen, no one had told him that the Boonton Opera House was on the second floor. He spent a considerable amount of time walking up and down Main Street trying to find the theater.

On Mr. Burns death in 1996, The Citizen quoted from their January 2, 1980, edition that Boonton resident Don Horan had on occasion met Mr. Burns and asked him if indeed Mr. Burns had played in Boonton. Mr. Burns replied "Boonton? Absolutely! It was at the top of the hill at the Opera House."

If Mr. Burns came to Main Street today, he would have no trouble finding the Boonton Opera House of his time. Recently finished exterior renovations have accurately captured the look of the original 1890 facade.

One of a number of recent Main Street renovations, including the Mansion House facade, Maxfield's On Main, and the Holmes Library, the Boonton Opera House renovation preserves an important structure from Boonton's past.

The current owners, Ann and Pat Cox, had considered ownership of the property for a number of years, and in November, 2012, they closed on the property and started renovation plans the next day.

Working with local architect Larry Korinda and the Boonton Historic Preservation Commission, a plan was developed to bring this property back to its former prominence on Main Street. Hidden behind scaffolding and tarpaulins while its transformation took place, the new exterior was finally revealed, and in



*Boonton Weekly Bulletin
September 3, 1896*



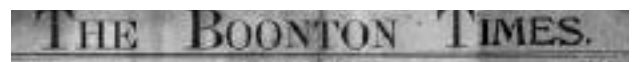
*Boonton Opera House 2016
Photograph: Jennifer Coultas*

May 2016, a ribbon cutting ceremony was held to celebrate the completion of exterior renovations of this grand Main Street building.

Guests were invited to take a sneak peak inside the original Opera House before interior renovations were completed. Of particular interest is the Opera House stage, which stood unused and forgotten for over 100 years, as well as a spectacular curved wood bead board ceiling in the auditorium. The owners also discovered, and would like to renovate, an original coal boiler found on the premises, perhaps not for use as intended, but certainly as a unique conversation piece.

On the front of the building, a punctuation oddity appears at the end of the name, a period after the name Boonton Opera House. Although no one can say why this was done in 1890, staying true to its original façade, the owners insisted that the period be preserved. If anyone is able to provide a clue to this unusual building notation, the owners would love to hear from you.

Editor's Note: We also discovered an edition of the Boonton Times from 1906 where the masthead shows a period after the name (THE BOONTON TIMES .)



Among the 21st century improvements are new air conditioning and heating systems, new windows and a new access to the building from the Boonton Avenue parking lot.



*Opera House Interior
Photograph: Ruth Lopes*

A staircase has been constructed (see picture below) with access to a balcony and conference rooms overlooking the auditorium.



*Interior Staircase
Photograph: Ruth Lopes*

The stage, while still standing, was in serious need of repair and was completely rebuilt and excavated underneath to provide additional useable space.



*Opera House Stage
Photograph: Ruth Lopes*

While the space is being constructed to lend itself to multiple uses, the respectful and thoughtful renovation ensures that this building will now enjoy a well-deserved renaissance on the Main Street of our historic town.

Remembering Our Friend Herb Goldenberg

We are saddened by the passing of our dear friend Herb Goldenberg. Herb was an active member and trustee of the Boonton Historical Society and Museum. He served as our volunteer coordinator for many years, and he also served the Society in many other capacities with enthusiasm and dedication.



A retired florist and an accomplished musician, Herb arranged our holiday floral decorations and designed floral displays for many of our house tours, exhibit openings and many other special occasions. In addition, he could always be called upon to play his trumpet at our holiday gatherings.

We continually challenged Herbie with all manner of tasks which he not only took on willingly, but would rise to the occasion every time. He was always our champion and supporter who organized and participated in our many projects and fund raisers during his many years of service to the Society and to our town.

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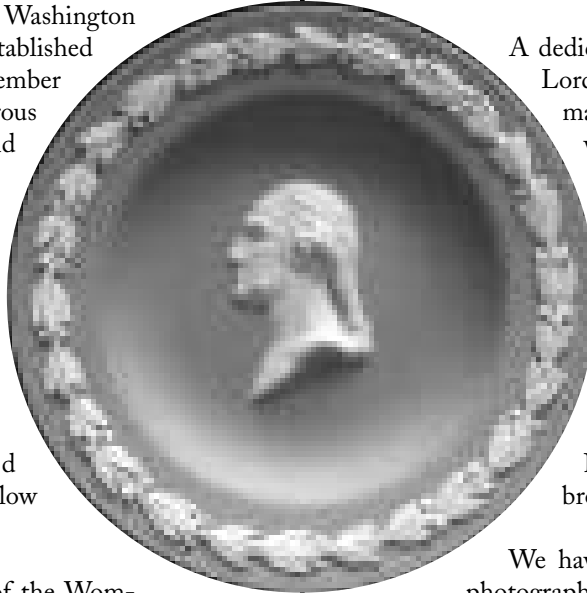
Herb had a long and successful life. He owned Bill's Village Florist in Del's Village for 30 years and played trumpet in his own popular wedding band, the Herb Daniels' Combo, in the 70's, 80's and 90's. He was past president of the Boonton Jewish Center and of the Boonton Chamber of Commerce, where he was elected Citizen of the Year, and was a longtime member of Rotary International. Born in Brooklyn, New York, we are grateful that a fork in the road brought Herb to Boonton, a town he loved.

Edited from the files of the late Arline Dempsey

The George Washington Bi-Centennial Tree

1932 marked the bicentennial of the birth of George Washington with celebrations and commemorations held throughout the country. Coins were struck, twelve new stamps were issued, and plates of varying sizes and designs were sold. The official George Washington Bicentennial Commission was established by President Coolidge in December

1924, organizing numerous projects, programs and celebrations to commemorate the historic date and encouraging communities and civic organizations throughout the United States to follow suit.



Eastern Star, Sokol, Boonton PTA, Father's Council of the PTA, Civic Committee, Girl Reserves, Girls Hi-Y, Boonton Fire Wardens, Boonton Women's Club, and Garden Group of the Boonton Women's Club.

A dedication ceremony was held in Grace Lord Park on July 20, 1931, where "every man, woman and child in Boonton" was invited to attend. The tree was registered on the national honor roll of the American Tree Association as a George Washington memorial tree.

The next time you visit Grace Lord park, take a minute to admire the beautiful spruce tree on the lawn area of the park. Nearby, mounted on a stone, is a bronze plaque.

In Boonton, the Garden Group of the Women's Club sponsored the planting of a 22-foot white spruce tree in Grace Lord Park "so that Boonton would have a permanent community Christmas tree that would also serve as an everlasting memorial to the father of our country in whose honor we are asked to plant trees." Since this was a community project, all organizations and lodges in Boonton were asked to participate in the funding of this tree. The following organizations contributed:

The Elks, I.O.O.F. (Odd Fellows), American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, Rotary Club-Boonton Chapter, Masons,

We have not been able to find any early photographs or articles about the Christmas tree, so it is unknown whether or not it was decorated or lit for the season or if any festivities took place around this community tree. Can anyone shed any light on this mystery? If so, please let us know at Boontonhistory@Boonton.org



*The George Washington Memorial Tree
Grace Lord Park 2016
Photograph: Jennifer Coultas*

Sears Modern Homes

Sears Roebuck and Co. Chicago

In these days of do-it-yourself and with big box stores selling all you need to create just about everything for your home, there is, as we have been told by our grandmothers and others, nothing new under the sun.

Between 1908 and 1940 it is estimated that Sears Roebuck sold more than 75,000 ready-to-assemble homes in 447 styles from elegant homes to simple cottages. Enjoying wide popularity throughout the country, the typical Sears home kit contained 30,000 pieces, including 750 pounds of nails, 27 gallons of paint and a 75-page instruction book. Sears estimated that the average carpenter would charge \$450 to assemble those 30,000 pieces, a painter would charge \$34.50 and that other skilled labor would cost \$1.00 an hour.

Homes could be customized according to varying tastes and individual requirements, while some floor plans indicated suggested placement for furniture and fixtures. Prices for these homes ranged from \$600-\$6,000.

Many of these homes can still be found nationwide and in excellent condition. They are a tribute to the many enterprising and talented individuals who decided to literally make a home for their family.

Not only did Sears market homes, they also sold kits for barns (one of which was an octagon style), schools, chicken houses, hog houses, milk houses, garages, and more.



The San Jose Model #P3268 (Photograph: Eric Wallin)

The above one and a half story house is one of the many models sold by Sears & Roebuck in the first third of the 20th century. This "mail-order" house was pre-fabricat-

ed by the manufacturer, and the kit included everything for construction and finishing of the dwelling. The price ranged from \$2026 to \$2138.

The San Jose, a five room Spanish colonial-inspired variation of the common bungalow house, was marketed by Sears in 1928 and 1929. The exterior elevation is stucco with sash and casement windows. The house has a gable roof with a brick and stucco exterior chimney. The house features five rooms and one bath with a fireplace and built-in bookshelves in the living room. The construction of this house in Boonton may have been delayed a few years by the onset of the Depression, since the house has been dated to the early thirties.

The house maintains all the original features which make it readily identifiable as a Sear's house. The brass and copper chandelier and the sconces in the living room are original to the house, as is most of the woodwork.



The Elsmore Model #208 (Photograph: Jennifer Coultas)

The above house, believed to be a modified Elsmore model, was marketed by Sears Roebuck from 1916 - 1926, and was constructed in Boonton in 1920. There were numerous bungalow styles which were very popular and inexpensive.



Continued on next page

Sears Modern Homes

The interior has five rooms and one bath. The porch, believed to have been enclosed by prior owners, still maintains its original stucco and wood gable. There were two floor plans available with this model and the cost ranged from \$858 to \$2,391.

Our member Diane Ferguson recalls living in a Sears home in Ono, Pa. In determining the history of the this house, Diane tells us that “we saw written on a beam that it was delivered to Jonestown, PA train station, and an “old timer” talked to us about it. We also had an old Sears catalog listing. The wood floors are very hard yellow pine from North Carolina, I was told. I loved the pocket doors, the wooden



*Sears Modern Home, Ono, PA
(Photograph: Diane Ferguson)*

shutters inside all the windows, the beautiful wooden staircase and trim throughout.”

Also on this little farmette was an old wooden-floored mechanic’s shop (now the Ono Post Office), a chickenhouse,

and three farm sheds. Although farm buildings were sold by Sears in kits, it is not known if these particular structures were indeed Sears construction.

We are always interested in adding new home styles and histories to our files of homes in Boonton. If you have a Sears home, or other historic property, we would like to hear from you. E-mail us at Boontonhistory@Boonton.org

Thornton, Rosemary. The Houses That Sears Built, Gentle Beam Publications, Norfolk, Virginia, 2004. Print
Stevenson, Katherine Cole and H. Ward, Jandl, Houses By Mail, John Wiley and Sons, New York, New York, 1986. Print

Some Tips On How to Research the History of a House

By Monica Scozzafava

RESEARCH DEEDS

- Find out the block and lot numbers and /or address of the house.
- Go to the tax assessor’s office in the Boonton Town Hall and ask to see the deeds on file for the house.
- If the town information does not tell the complete story, note the book and page of the newest deed and take that information to the deed room in the clerk’s office, Morris County Offices, Morristown.
- Continue to research the older deeds on file in the county clerk’s office, starting with the present owner and working backwards. Let the personnel in the clerk’s office know that you are researching the age/history of a house, and they will offer help and advice.
- Pay particular attention to the financial transaction statements on the deeds. It will help you determine when a capital improvement (usually the construction of a house) was made. For example, if the land sold for \$100 in 1860, but \$1000 in 1865, this probably indicates that a capital improvement was made sometime within those five years.

CONSULT MAPS

These maps are available at the Boonton Holmes Library. Depending on the age of the house being researched, it might be noted on one of these maps.

Beers, F. W. 1868 Atlas of Morris County map of Boonton

Robinson, E. 1887 Atlas of Morris County map of Boonton

Fowler & Bailey Boonton, New Jersey 1903 map of Boonton

CONSULT BOOKS

These books are available at the Boonton Holmes Library. They give information about some of the homes in Boonton.

Korinda, Lawrence Profile of Boonton, Independent Senior Study, Carnegie-Mellon Univ, 1975

Fowler, Alex D. Splinters from the Past, Morris County Historical Society, 1984

Acroterion Historic Preservation Consultants Morris County Historic Sites Survey, Morris County Heritage Commission, 1986/1987

Boonton Historical Society Joins The Pathways of History for the Seventh Year

Boonton Historical Society, a founding member of the Pathways of History Weekend Tour of Historic Places, will join 18 northern Morris County historic venues for the seventh year on October 8 from 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM and Sunday, October 9 from Noon – 4:00 PM.

The Boonton Historical Society & Museum will highlight our new exhibit “Transportation In, Out & About Boonton”. Beginning with the opening of the Morris Canal, the extension of the railroad and the inception of local trolley services, transportation has played a major role in Boonton’s development. Our new exhibit celebrates this role as Boonton has grown from an industrial center to its contemporary cultural landscape.

In addition, the museum gift shops will offer a wide range of gifts for all occasions, including Boontonware, signed books and prints by local authors, antique postcards, Boonton T-shirts and sweatshirts, maps of Old Boonton, and much more.

Don’t forget to reserve your copy of our new publication “Images of America: Boonton,” available in early 2017.



Morris Canal at Boonton (Postcard: Boonton Postcards)

At the c. 1740 Miller-Kingsland House, we will be featuring a display of vintage clothing, settings of an antique china pattern taken from a tapestry in a medieval English manor house, and an 1880’s era Daniel F. Beatty organ. Home to only three families over the generations since it was built, the Miller-Kingsland house is the oldest recorded home in Boonton still standing.

Vintage Clothing at Miller-Kingsland (Photo: Jennifer Coultas)



Daniel Beatty Organ (Photograph: Jennifer Coultas)

Organized in 2010 as a way to encourage the public to visit local museums and landmark properties, Pathways has become a popular yearly event attracting hundreds of enthusiastic tour goers. This year’s eclectic collection highlights small, volunteer-



run historic properties in Boonton, Boonton Township, Butler, Dover, Florham Park, Kinnelon, Lake Hopatcong, Mine Hill, Montville Township, Mount Tabor, Parsippany, Pequannock Township, Randolph, Riverdale, Roxbury Township, and Washington Township.

Venerable 18th century structures, many predating the Revolutionary War, offer German folk-tradition and Dutch stone examples, as well as those of Georgian and Saltbox construction. The 1758 Randolph Friends Meeting House is purported to be Morris County’s oldest extant hand-hewn building. Designs of the 19th century are represented in buildings of varied uses and sizes including a Folk Victorian Camp Meeting Cottage, an 1890’s Colonial Revival, a diminutive two-family iron miner’s dwelling which is included on the New Jersey Women’s Heritage Trail, three schoolhouses, two 19th century railway stations, a Morris Canal lock tender’s house, a general store and several wonderful examples of vernacular farmhouses. Old graveyards are part of several sites and are open to respectful visitation by the public. Many of the museums have wonderful shops offering a selection of books, gifts and souvenirs - some serving light refreshments.

More details about this exceptional heritage tour can be found on our website:
www.PathwaysofHistoryNJ.com.

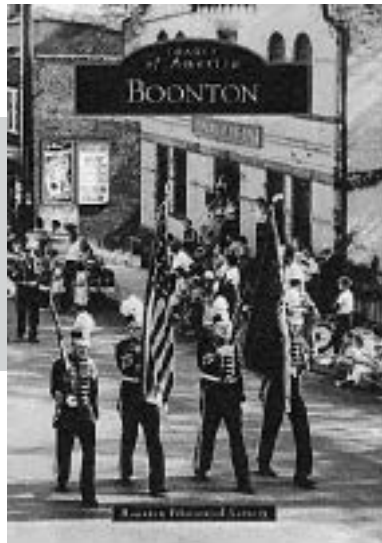


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Open on Sundays from 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.
and by appointment.



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