



THE HISTORIC COUNTY

Volume 14 • Issue 3
Summer 2104

NEWSLETTER OF THE
PASSAIC COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Bloomington • Clifton • Haledon • Hawthorne • Little Falls • North Haledon
Passaic • Paterson • Pompton Lakes • Prospect Park • Ringwood • Totowa
Wanaque • Wayne • West Milford • Woodland Park

THE BEEFSTEAK: A FAVORITE REGIONAL CUISINE

By Robert Cohen

New England has its clam chowder, New Orleans has its gumbo, the South has its fried chicken and Maryland has its crab cakes. Northern New Jersey has its own dining experience, which is almost entirely limited to Passaic and Bergen Counties, the beefsteak dinner.

The origin of the beefsteak is vague, but seems to have evolved from mid-nineteenth century Manhattan. Originally there were both “East Side” and “West Side” versions. The “East Side” version was a working class and immigrant experience, while the “West Side” seems to have been more upscale. Even though diners experienced a variety of courses including various types of meats and vegetables, the dinner evolved to the present main course of beef “finger food.” Then, as now, silverware was optional.

The main course is now a tender beef loin, dipped in a butter sauce. Trays of this ethereal concoction are brought to tables on large serving trays and passed around. The beef is served on morsels of thin bread. Usually there are beer and soft drinks available and in many places appetizers, such as salad and antipasto, are also served. But the *pièce de résistance* remains the prized trays of “beefsteaks.” They are passed around on a continuing basis until everyone is satisfied. Then, of course, there is a dessert, usually consisting of coffee and an ice cream dish.

The early beefsteaks were men only affairs, probably because so many of these dinners were political fundraisers. Tammany Hall was known to hold beefsteaks. With passage of the Nineteenth Amendment giving women the right to vote, the politicians wisely began to include the fairer sex. Then and now beefsteaks are co-ed.

While the popularity of the beefsteak waned in New York City, it bloomed in Passaic and Bergen Counties. In 1938, a Clifton grocer and butcher named Garret “Hap” Nightengale started promoting the beefsteak in our region. He set the template which has been followed closely ever since. Sliced beef tenderloin in melted butter is served on thin slices of Italian or white bread, with French-fried potatoes. Accompanying this feast are pitchers of beer and soft drinks. Custom allows diners to only eat the beef, leaving the bread slices to pile up. The piles of bread serve as an indication of the amount consumed by a table or group.



Even as far back as 1912, the beefsteak dinner was known as an enjoyable, gastronomic delight. In this May 25 photo, members of Paterson's all-male Lambs Club assembled at the Manhattan Hotel for a few hours of hearty eating, kibitzing, and old-fashioned revelry. Managed by Harry Barclay, the hotel occupied an entire city block on Market Street. The Lambs desired a souvenir of this happy occasion, so in a blinding flash of magnesium powder, the Heinrichs photo studio immortalized the “boys” in their suits and spiffy white aprons. Beefsteak dinners persist as a time-honored tradition in Passaic County.

(Collections of the Passaic County Historical Society)

Today virtually all beefsteaks serve as fundraisers for a variety of causes and organizations. The Passaic County Historical Society itself has sponsored a beefsteak for a number of years at the Brownstone in Paterson. Sometimes a Tricky Tray and entertainment are included, to round out the festivities. Bon Appetite.

PASSAIC COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

LAMBERT CASTLE

3 Valley Road
Paterson, NJ 07503-2932

Museum: (973) 247-0085

Fax: (973) 881-9434

E-mail: info@lambertcastle.org

Website: lambertcastle.org

OFFICERS

Glenn Corbett
President

Linda Kaplanovich
First Vice President

Edwina Hibbel
Second Vice President

Robert Vermeulen
Treasurer

Vacant
Secretary

TRUSTEES

Catherine Cavallo

Andrea DeLuca

William Liess

Helen Mault

Phil Mezzina

Dolores D. Most

Walter Nacnodovitz

Maryjane Proctor

John Pullara

Edward A. Smyk

Cathy Tonnon

HONORARY LIFE TRUSTEES

Norman Robertson

Edward A. Smyk

HONORARY TRUSTEE

Hazel Spiegelberger

STAFF

Heather Garside,
*Acting Historic Site Manager
and Curator*

Dorothy Decker,
Administrative Assistant

Henrietta Weiss, *Head Docent*
William Collins, *Docent*

Patrick Byrnes,
Library Research Specialist

Lambert Castle, a picturesque 1892 Victorian mansion located on the Garret Mountain Reserve, is on the National Register of Historic Places. The Castle is operated and managed by the Passaic County Historical Society, a not-for-profit 501(c) educational institution.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

August 6 to October 5 **Exhibit: Pancakes, Patties and Pies: The History of the Silk City Diner Company of Paterson.** 3rd floor gallery at Lambert Castle. Regular admission.

August 13 Wednesday **PCHS Quarterly Meeting:** 7 p.m. at Lambert Castle. Business meeting of the Society, followed by *Letters from the Civil War*. This presentation focuses on two New Jersey soldiers who served in the Civil War: Private Robert Aitkin, Company B, 4th New Jersey & Commissary Sargent/ 2nd Lieutenant Matthew S. Austin, Companies G & I, 5th New Jersey. Presented by Dennis Buttacavoli. Free admission to the public.

September 13 Saturday **PCHS Genealogy Club Meeting:** 10 a.m. at Lambert Castle. Speaker Greta Nettleton will be presenting "*The Quack's Daughter*." Greta Nettleton is a historian and author of *The Quack's Daughter* - a true story about the private life of a Victorian college girl. Greta has a BA in history from Duke University and an MA from University of Texas.

September 21 Sunday **Exhibit Reception:** 2 p.m. at Lambert Castle, *Manufacturing Roadside Landmarks: The Story of Paterson's Silk City Diners* co-curator and author Michael Gabriele will talk about the history of the Silk City Diner and its legacy. Regular admission applies.

September 30 Tuesday **Annual Beefsteak Dinner and Tricky-Tray:** 6:30 p. m. at the Brownstone Restaurant, Paterson. A fun-filled evening of food and tricky-tray. Proceeds benefit the Passaic County Historical Society. Tickets \$50, reservations required.

Oct. 6 to Nov. 6 **Castle/Museum Closed** to set-up for the Lambert Castle Holiday Boutique.

October 11 Saturday **PCHS Genealogy Club Meeting:** 10 a.m. at Lambert Castle. Speaker Melissa Johnson will be presenting "*Going Paperless - Digitizing your Genealogical Research*." Melissa is a Professional genealogist specializing in NJ&NY and British research.

November 8 Saturday **PCHS Genealogy Club Meeting:** 10 a.m. Location and Program TBA.

November 8 to November 30 **27th Annual Lambert Castle Holiday Boutique:** Open Wednesday through Friday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., Saturday and Sunday 10 a.m. to 5 pm. (Closed Thanksgiving Day). No strollers or carriages, please.

November 12 Wednesday **PCHS Quarterly Meeting:** 7 p.m. at the Louis Bay Library, Hawthorne. Business meeting of the Society followed by *Rosie the Riveter and her sisters: The Women of World War II*. Rosie and her sisters changed America forever, not only by their work during the war but also by expanding the presence of women in the workplace, the arts and professions.

Visit lambertcastle.org for the most up-to-date event information.

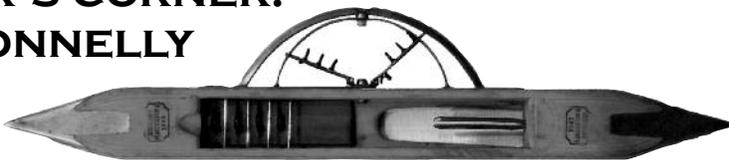
VOLUNTEER'S CORNER: KEN DONNELLY

In addition to the college interns assisting our curator, there are a number of local

volunteers who contribute several hours each week helping with various projects within the PCHS collections. A large part of this work involves researching and digitizing the Society's huge collection of artifacts, photos and documents.

Ken Donnelly joined PCHS in January 2012, following a long career in the advertising display field as a designer and Art Director of Point of Purchase displays and exhibits. Ken grew up in Clifton, but lived both out of state and in a number of other towns in New Jersey before returning to the area in 2004. Toward the end of his design consulting business he began looking into volunteering options.

There are many organizations in the area searching for volunteers, but Ken was seeking an activity that might utilize his interests in exhibits, artwork and history. His background in industrial design is helpful when encountering Passaic County's manufacturing past and when examining the many different products in the Society's collection. Since 2012 he has researched numerous items for inclusion into the PastPerfect software and helped with setting up for each season's program or new exhibit offering. Ken has enjoyed working with the variety of objects over the past two years, but the loom shuttles were definitely one of his favorites because of the variety and the intricacy with which they were handcrafted. Each one had an almost sculptural form. The eyewear (spectacles) were interesting too because there were many types from different eras.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE – JULY 2014

On behalf of the entire Board of Trustees, we wish to thank you for your vote of confidence at the Society's recent annual meeting. We all look forward to a productive and exciting year ahead.

Ours is a busy historical society, mounting historical exhibits, conducting lectures, sponsoring concerts, and hosting a variety of other events. Our fundraisers are many, including the annual holiday boutique, Victorian teas, and several other affairs. Both our museum and library are visited by many people every year.

And yet, we as a society are uniquely positioned – it can be argued, obligated – to take an active role in advancing the cause of Passaic County history and historic preservation outside the walls of Lambert Castle. Recently, it came to our attention that a particularly unusual and significant home in Wayne is to be demolished as part of a flood abatement program.

Wayne Township's Francis A. Burdett house, (more commonly known as the "house built in the dark") was constructed in 1928

by the legally blind 57 year-old Frank Burdett. His two and a half story home attracted many visitors and the attention of the New York Times over the years. Its impending demolition resulted in a unanimous Board of Trustees resolution, prepared by County Historian and Trustee Ed Smyk, that our Society sent to the Federal Emergency Management Agency which is in charge of the flood mitigation project. It is our hope that this home can be spared, upgraded for flood resistance, and repurposed for use as public use.

As we enter our 88th year of incorporation, let us renew our efforts in advocacy and "spreading the word" of Passaic County history. I look forward to working with each of you as we move forward.

Glenn Corbett
President

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM OUR FEDERICI RESTORATION SPONSOR RECEPTION



Frank and Dawn Spacarotella with *Roll of Honor*, which they restored in honor of Charles and Josephine Pelose.



Members of the Knights of Columbus councils 11671 and 262, with the four Federici pieces they restored.



County Historian Edward Smyk and curator Heather Garside with *Hernando De Soto* and *Niobe and Daughter*, both funded in part by the Passaic County Cultural and Heritage Council at Passaic County Community College through a general operating support grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State.



Dave D'Arco and Maria Carparelli, officers of the Passaic-Clifton Chapter of Unico, with *Pledge of Allegiance*.

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PATERSON, NJ
PERMIT NO. 132

PASSAIC COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Lambert Castle, 3 Valley Road
Paterson, New Jersey 07503



PASSAIC COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Annual Beefsteak and Tricky Tray
Fundraiser

Restaurant gift certificates, gourmet baskets and much more!

Tuesday September 30, 2014
6:30 PM

\$50 per person

THE BROWNSTONE
351 W. Broadway, Paterson, NJ 07582

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED
Phone: 973-247-0085 Ext. 201

