



# THE HISTORIC COUNTY

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NEWSLETTER OF THE  
PASSAIC COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Passaic • Paterson • Pompton Lakes • Prospect Park • Ringwood • Totowa  
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## THE SOCIETY'S LAMBERT CASTLE MUSEUM AN EIGHTIETH ANNIVERSARY REMINISCENCE

By E. A. Smyk, Passaic County Historian

Eighty years ago, on Thursday evening October 25, 1934, a caravan of automobiles wended their way up Lambert Castle's serpentine driveway. It was a bracing night, cool and crisp, the kind of weather that would have delighted Catholina Lambert during the golden decades he and his family occupied the showplace, with its glittering array of treasures gathered from the storied art capitals of Europe and America. Soon, a large gathering of people filed through the Castle's huge oaken front door, ready to witness another chapter in the building's history, the formal public opening of the Passaic County Historical Society's museum and library.

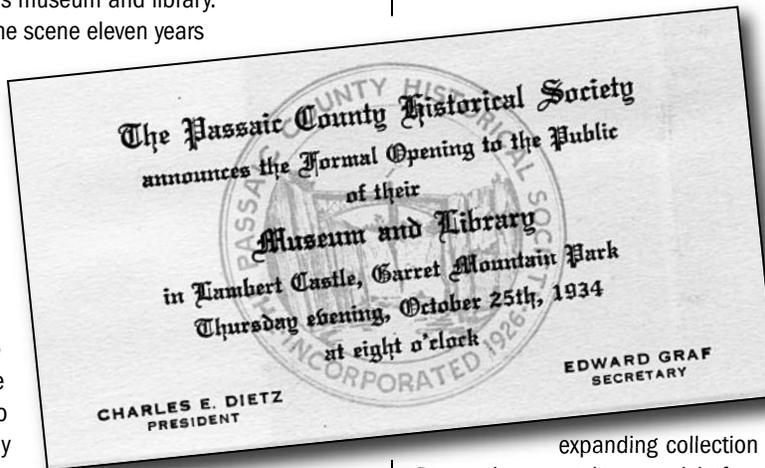
Lambert himself passed from the scene eleven years before, but his memory still endured in the minds of many guests, this self-made, energetic Paterson silk tycoon who lived to see the essence of his rags-to-riches, Horatio Alger-like ambitions recorded in the pages of Silk City's turbulent history. Was it a combination of fate, pure business adventure, and the potential for amassing a huge fortune that ultimately lured him to Paterson? We shall never fully understand the reasons, but some facts are incontrovertible. The Castle's spacious rooms had indeed sheltered him through times of triumph and adversity. He built the place to resemble an impregnable fortress high upon a hill, in this case, on one of the rocky, yet commanding escarpments of Garret Mountain, and he would stuff it to overflowing with carefully chosen old world and impressionist oil paintings. Born in England, Lambert developed a knack for welcoming desirable visitors, not like a common *Nouveau riche* businessman in search of ego-driven adulation, but rather like a refined British aristocrat who developed a hankering for sharing his superbly chosen acquisitions with all the verve of a sincere, well-informed art connoisseur.

*Belle Vista*, the name Lambert had given his brownstone and granite pile, attracted people from far and wide, but the one best remembered was William McKinley, the twenty-fifth President of the United States. After being squired around by the beaming silk magnate, McKinley, in a burst of ebullience, uttered words that must have gladdened Lambert's heart, "We have here," he quipped, "the nucleus of an American Louvre." Lambert lived on through the first three years of the rambunctious Jazz Age, albeit in reduced financial circumstances, until the infirmities of advanced

age claimed the old castellan, but on this particular night, as the Great Depression continued to torment the average man and woman, his presence lingered in the thoughts of many who walked through the Castle's still impressive rooms. Dismal as the times were, the Passaic County Historical Society had found a permanent home, a headquarters to hold lectures, disseminate historical knowledge, and to display and house its fledgling, but ever

expanding collection of artifacts, books and documents.

Depression or not, it was a night for celebration and rejoicing. The Lambert persona, so entwined with the history of Paterson, would now become inseparable with the Society's history. Garret A. Hobart, Jr., the son of McKinley's vice president, and the chief executive of the Passaic County Park Commission, the proprietors of *Belle Vista*, had this comment to make before the assembled throng: "Many times have I been in this Castle, the guest of Catholina Lambert, and I wonder what he would say were he here this evening. Would he commend my action in inviting this splendid society? I am sure of it. The invitation came about from the inspiration I received as I understood the objective and the sincere interest and fidelity of the members."



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## PASSAIC COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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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.

## LAMBERT CASTLE MUSEUM *cont. from page 1*

It was an evening of congratulatory messages. Dr. Leo Becker, representing his Passaic County Freeholder colleagues, told the assembled history lovers the freeholder board "will be glad to cooperate at all times for a furtherance of this work." The Society's Princeton-educated President, Paterson School Principal Charles Enos Dietz, renowned for his passionate commitment to all things historical, summarized what had been accomplished since the Society's founding eight years before. Yes, the Society had diligently accumulated hundreds of relics and a library of nearly 1900 volumes, but as Dietz recounted, artifacts, books, and "the enlargement of the museum are not our greatest aims." The kindly looking bespectacled school master proclaimed loftier thoughts. He pointed out they were the "means to that greater objective: to arouse and cultivate in ourselves and our citizenry that historic consciousness that will learn, love and perpetuate the history so abundantly made in our county; and honor and emulate the men and women who made that history locally and nationally from colonial to present days."

The keynote address was delivered by Harry Gale McNamee, publisher of the *Pompton Lakes Bulletin* and vice president of the Bergen County Historical Society. McNamee was in the process of publishing a 68-page book tracing the history of the historic Church of the Ponds in Oakland. He touched on the fluidity of local history, advising in his well-received address, "to study Ramapo valley we must forget county lines, for the original section included part of New York State." Other speakers included representatives from the national and state leadership cadres of the Sons of the American Revolution, the New Jersey Historical Society, the New York Historical Society, and the Paterson Chamber of Commerce.

Looming as large as life over the evening's festivities was the substantial collection of artifacts given outright and loaned by Jennie Tuttle Hobart, the aged widow of Vice President Hobart, and a remarkable person in her own right. The Hobarts were near legendary in Paterson for their charitable and cultural endeavors. At the time of her husband's premature demise, in 1899, when income taxes were seen as a mere annoyance, the successful lawyer turned politician's estate was valued in excess of \$2,000,000, which in today's purchasing power is calculated at a staggering \$57,900,000. Under the terms of the will, Mrs. Hobart was bequeathed half the estate.

Thus it came to pass that she was perceived as the reigning doyenne of local philanthropy, her sole counterpart being the generous Nathan Barnert, the former city mayor affectionately dubbed by legions of admirers as "Paterson's Grand Old Man" for his compassionate attentiveness to the less fortunate and downtrodden. Mrs. Hobart went about her charitable work in quiet ways, helping the dispossessed in France and Belgium recover from the ravages of World War I, for which she was subsequently decorated by both governments.

On June 23, 1933, Rutgers University conferred upon her the degree of Doctor of Philanthropy, *honoris causa*, in acknowledgement of her lifetime accomplishments. Dr. Robert C. Clothier, the President of Rutgers, summed it up nicely when he said that "our country needs more women like you, who modestly and unassumingly, exert great influence toward appreciation of those values of life which are real and eternal."

The life of Garret A. Hobart was on display that night, told in the family's artifacts arranged by Mrs. Mollie Chadwick Winchester, Mrs. Hobart's faithful chronicler, with "an eye for the dramatic rather than the passive," as *The Paterson Morning Call* reported. They were temporarily housed in Lambert's former dining room, but were relocated soon afterward to the drawing room. Until 1977, when the "McKinley-Hobart Room" was dismantled and the majority of objects placed in storage, the memorabilia proved to be one of the Society's more absorbing exhibits.

Jennie Hobart thrived on telling and retelling her memories as the plucky and adaptable second lady of the United States during the time her husband served as vice president. For her, the past was not dead and buried, but churned with an unchecked vibrancy. The old dowager would often visit the room, on days the museum was closed to visitors, with her personal secretary and companion, Mary Adele Sheehan.



**Hobart family tableau: four generations duly remembered, 1935.**  
From left, Garret A. Hobart, Jr., Jennie Tuttle Hobart holding Garret A. Hobart IV,  
and Garret A. Hobart III.

*Photo, Hobart Collection, PCHS*

It became almost a ritual. A telephone call would come from Carroll Hall, the Hobart residence in Paterson, announcing that Mrs. Hobart wished to be received at the museum. Not long after, a chauffeured limousine would conduct her to the front entrance. Awaiting her presence was then Curator Rudolph C. M. Hartmann, white haired, scholarly, with wire-rimmed spectacles, looking the soul of discretion. She would be escorted to the Hobart room, where she would gravitate toward one of the intricately carved, velvet cushioned chairs that once had a place of honor in Carroll Hall. Curator Hartmann would occupy its twin, and then, as if a switch was flipped, Mrs. Hobart's memories would spill from her lips, unabated, for about one hour. Suddenly, she would stop speaking, the signal that her voyage back in time had ended, and that her chauffeur must be summoned for the return home. (Curator Hartmann made notes on the retrospective after Mrs. Hobart had left the premises, but no trace of them have ever surfaced.)

The Hobart legacy has dimmed through time, but it seems especially bright now, as the Society celebrates the museum's eightieth birthday. When the Society organized, in March 1926, Lambert Castle was looked upon as an appealing prospect for a headquarters building, but it was for all intents and purposes just a wish. Nothing concrete materialized, but in October 1931, the Society made known its intentions, on a strictly private basis, with Garret A. Hobart, Jr. Exactly what persuasive maneuvering took place did not make it into writing, but official park commission and historical society correspondence and minutes indicate that progress toward accommodating the Society was well along by mid-June 1934, when alteration work had resumed on adapting the Castle as the park commission's central administrative building. Working in tandem with park officials, the Society's unassuming Secretary, Edward M. Graf reported that the first artifacts had been moved from the Danforth Memorial Library in Paterson, with the museum's auspicious opening date set for October 25th. The move generated, both before and after press attention, with *The New York Times* leading off with an article datelined October 21, "Historical Group to Use Old Castle."



**Charles E. Dietz, the Society's second president, 1929-1935. He authored *A History of Paterson and Passaic County*.**

*Photo, Founder's Collection, PCHS*

In December 1968, Robert P. Brooks, one of the Society's founders and erudite members, decided it was time for him to retire from the board of trustees. He had done his part, and even more, but he was unshaken in his optimism that the Society would continue, and be invigorated by newcomers who shared his sense of interest and commitment. He expressed in gracious words, "the earnest hope that the dedicated and selfless men and women who have worked long and hard will continue to do so, and that many new persons will come forth to assist them in this service." Indeed, these are fitting remarks to conclude this narrative, where a mostly all volunteer group of people carved from nothing a museum, library and archives. The Society has stood the test of time. It wears the cloak of tradition, and the knowledge of a task well done.

#### References Consulted

Much of the information contained in this narrative is drawn from the yet to be published manuscript by Edward A. Smyk and Robert P. Brooks, "The Origin and Early History of the Passaic County Historical Society." Additional sources are Flavia Alaya, *Silk and Sandstone, the Story of Catholina Lambert and His Castle*, (Paterson: Passaic County Historical Society, 1984); *Bulletin of the Passaic County Historical Society*, (December 1955), IV, No. 3; "Historical Group To Use Old Castle, Passaic Society Will Open a New Library and Museum in Lambert Mansion," *New York Times*, October 21, 1934; "Historical Society Opening Thursday, New Home At Lambert Castle To Be Dedicated," *Paterson Morning Call*, October 22, 1934; "Historical Society Dedicates Rooms, Quarters at Lambert's Castle Opened to the Public," *Paterson Morning Call*, October 26, 1934; Dr. William H. Raufuss, "Passaic County Historical Society Opens Castle Headquarters," *Paterson Evening News*, October 27, 1934; and "Garret A. Hobart's Will, Estate of the Late Vice President Valued at \$2,000,000, A Million For Mrs. Hobart," *New York Times*, December 2, 1934. Also consulted were the *Minutes of the PCHS Board of Trustees* held in the Society's archive, the *Minutes of the Passaic County Park Commission*, and the file of correspondence maintained by the commission between 1934 and 1958 relative to establishing the Society's museum, including related and miscellaneous administrative matters. The latter documentation was photocopied and indexed by E. A. Smyk in November 1982. The story of Mrs. Hobart's impromptu visits to the Castle was imparted to him by the late Edward M. Graf, the Society's Secretary, and later Curator as well as Librarian, in the summer of 1964. In preparing this article, the author wishes to acknowledge the editorial contributions of Heather Garside, PCHS Curator/Historic Site Manager, and Robert Hazekamp, the Society's Librarian Emeritus, for his graphic design talents.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Some historical societies were created to provide a venue for lectures dealing with the past. Others were started to save a historic building. Many historical societies came into existence to preserve artifacts of the past.

Since our inception, the Passaic County Historical Society has amassed thousands of items, including a chair made of wood from the original Society of Useful Manufactures' directors table, original Curtiss Wright files, a collection of Julian Rix paintings, and the largest collection of souvenir spoons in the country. Simply put, we have an incredible wide-ranging set of artifacts and ephemera. All of these possessions require proper storage and care. Conservation is critical.

Over the last few years, we have been cataloging our entire collection, entering detailed information and photographs into a museum-specific software program. Thousands of items have been entered already. Eventually, the information that we have recorded will allow us to make our collection more accessible through our Society website to interested people all around the world.

One particular aspect of this information collection effort is an assessment of each item's condition and need for restoration and repairs. We take damaged or degraded items to conservation experts who have know-how in the particular type of item, be it a painting, a piece of clothing, or a document. Thanks to the wonderful donation from the estate of PCHS member Jean Wardle, we are able to greatly increase our conservation efforts. During our Holiday Boutique, we will be sending off the Lambert dining room chairs to a historic furniture conservator, which will make much needed repairs, including restoring the chairs' intricate carvings.

While we have many items in our collection, we are always looking for more. We are interested in items directly related to Passaic County, be it an early photo of home or a nineteenth century set of clothing worn by a Passaic County resident. We are particularly interested in "up-county" artifacts from the northern reaches of Passaic County. If you have something you'd like to donate, please contact our curator Heather Garside.

I look forward to seeing you all amongst our castle-filled artifacts!

*Glenn Corbett*

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Lambert Castle, 3 Valley Road  
Paterson, New Jersey 07503



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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- 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.
- December 10-12 and December 15-16** **Gingerbread House Competition Drop-Off.** 9 a.m.- 3p.m. Children aged 6-16 are invited to deliver their homemade gingerbread houses to be displayed at Lambert Castle from Dec 17- Jan 4. The best house(s) will be judged and the winner(s) will receive a prize. Entering a house is free. Call ahead before delivery (973)247-0085 x 201
- December 12, Friday** **Bell Ringers by Candlelight.** 6 p.m. – 9 p.m. at Lambert Castle. Listen to the Valley Ringers perform Christmas music on their bells as you tour the Castle by candlelight. Tour is self-guided. Light refreshments provided. Admission Adults \$12, Seniors \$10, Children \$8.
- December 13, Saturday** **PCHS Genealogy Club Holiday Brunch.** 10 a.m. Clifton Senior Center, Clifton.
- December 14, Sunday** **Storytelling and Sing-along with Santa and Mrs. Claus.** 1 p.m.- 3p.m. Join us as Santa and Mrs. Claus visit Lambert Castle to tell some stories and sing some holiday songs. Recommended for children under 10 years old. Tickets \$15 for one adult and one child. Each additional adult or child is \$5. Limited seating, reservations required. Call (973) 247-0085 ext. 201 for reservations.
- December 17 to January 4** **Lambert Castle Holiday Tours.** 1 p.m. – 4 p.m., Wednesday-Sunday. Take a tour around Lambert Castle and see the rooms decorated for the holidays. Regular admission fees apply.
- December 12 to March 29** **Exhibit: A Closer Look at Our Community: The Fine Art of Mark Oberndorf.** 3rd floor gallery at Lambert Castle. Regular admission.

**Visit [lambertcastle.org](http://lambertcastle.org) for the most up-to-date event information.**

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