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REMEMBERING BROOKS-SLOATE

By Patricia Post

The Brooks-Sloate development was one of the first housing projects of twentieth century Paterson. For many struggling residents it was a welcome addition to the city. After years of living in cramped and below-standard housing, this development of over twenty-three acres was the perfect place for young couples of modest income to raise a family. Completed in 1951, Brooks-Sloate differed from other housing projects. Rather than being located in the more urban part of the city, it was nestled in the sloping hills and wooded areas of suburbia. The project was named after George Brooks and Clarence Sloate of the Paterson Housing Authority. Both men were well-respected in their field, so it made sense for the project to bear their names. Brooks-Sloate was made up of 242, two-story townhouse-type homes within forty-two brick buildings. Each building contained four to eight dwellings and offered either two, three or four bedrooms. Each dwelling had its own front and back entrance, as well as a backyard and front area for outside enjoyment. The grounds of Brooks-Sloate included several common areas of large open space, play areas, wide streets and a baseball field.

Brooks-Sloate was truly its own community. Though it was considered a housing project, the development had a real neighborhood feel. Everyone knew their neighbors, since socializing was a large part of living in Brooks-

Sloate. Adults would gather on front porches and backyards for conversation and there was always an abundance of children at play. There were plenty of activities to pass the time - from playing ball in the playground, to swinging on a tire swing from an old tree in the woods that bordered Brooks-Sloate. In the summer the ice cream truck would be a daily treat, and in the winter there were plenty of hills for sledding. Other activities included go-carting down the steep streets, hop-scotch and playing on

swings in the playground. There was also a truck that frequently came around, containing portable carnival rides, such as the whip and ferris wheel. Kids were never bored at Brooks-Sloate, as there was always something to do and someone to do it with.

Most of the children from Brooks-Sloate attended Paterson schools #19, #5 and John F. Kennedy High School. Just walking to school with all of the neighborhood kids was an adventure, and the first stop was the

Colonial Sweet Shop to stock up on candy, gum and soda. Another distraction on the way was the Molly Ann Brook, where walking over the rocks and trying not to get wet added a bit of fun. This trip back and forth to school would be made four times a day, since most kids went home for lunch in those days. The walk to school was quite long, but that just meant more time to spend with your friends.

Joanie Plavier Royer, who grew up in Brooks-Sloate, had this to say:

Bernard Payne with Debbie and Patty Meyers enjoying one of the many common areas of Brooks-Sloate circa 1950.

Photograph courtesy of Bernard Payne.

"We moved to Brooks-Sloate in 1960 when I was 4 years old. What I remember about those days is that there were so many kids! I remember sleigh-riding on Suicide Hill, where

the adventurous at heart would sleigh. I also remember my mother buying fruits and vegetables from the peddler and the Tarzan swing in the mountains, where we would play all day. We would build forts, pick raspberries and explore. I remember walking to school over Molly Ann's Brook and crossing over the rocks instead of the foot bridge. We lived there for 18 years and I have many happy childhood memories!"¹



40-4 Colonial Avenue in the Brooks-Sloate development. Photograph courtesy of Bernard Payne.

**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.

BROOKS-SLOATE *cont. from page 1*

Bernard Payne, who moved to Brooks-Sloate in 1953 reminisced: "I remember playing many days in the little woods, which was later replaced by Buckley Park, hiking the Preakness Hills and touch football on Colonial Ave. I also remember the ice cream trucks, mobile rides and games in the big box in the playground. In the 60s, my dad became one of the maintenance crew and also maintained the boilers. It was the perfect place for a kid to grow up."²

Jack Bornstein, a resident from 1959 to 1962, has very personal memories of life in Brooks-Sloate: "One day at the end of May 1959, my father suffered a massive heart attack and died in our unit at 26-6 Kent Rd. The close community of kids to play with was a therapeutic distraction for us. We survived, and that's what growing up in Paterson instilled. I always return to the projects when I visit from Texas. It'll always be home. Our roots are bound in the soil and bricks of Brooks-Sloate projects."³

During the 1980s, there was some speculation of Brooks-Sloate becoming a cooperative, and after years of ironing out specifics and making several improvements to the aging development, tenants were able to purchase their rentals at inexpensive prices. By 1992, the development became the Brooks-Sloate Terrace Cooperative. Today, Brooks-Sloate does not look quite as it did back in its early years. The buildings have been remodeled, the old playground is now a parking lot, the ball field is covered with grass and looks more like a pasture, and the trees that were just saplings back then are now tall and canopy the streets and yards.

Bernard has created a Facebook page where former residents from the 50's, 60's and 70's can renew old friendships and share memories from that special time in their lives (Note: There is a separate Facebook page for current co-op residents of Brooks-Sloate entitled "The Family of Brooks-Sloate"); a time when life was much simpler and their biggest worry of the day was wondering what time the ice cream truck would appear. Via the Facebook page, the spirit of those long-gone days of Brooks-Sloate has been captured in time through photos and recollections shared by former kids whose hearts will always be in Brooks-Sloate. These kids are now well into their 50's and 60's, but the ghosts of the children they once were still play on the sites of the old playground, ball field and streets of Brooks-Sloate.

If anyone would like to share their own memories, stories and photographs of Brooks-Sloate development with the author, Patricia would love to hear from you. She can be contacted directly at patricia_post12@yahoo.com

References:

"Life at Brooks Sloate" (The Paterson Chronicle, Sept. 9, 1951)

"About New Jersey" by Anthony DePalma (The New York Times, Aug. 23, 1992)

"Converting Public Housing to Cooperatives," William Rohe

1 Personal memories of Joan Plavier Royer conveyed to the author in writing July 2015.

2 Personal memories of Bernard Payne conveyed to the author in writing July 2015.

3 Personal memories of Jack Bornstein conveyed to the author in writing July 2015.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

During this time of year it is customary to think of all that we are thankful for and the people we appreciate. During my tenure as president of the PCHS I have become increasingly aware of the enormous amount of time, effort and commitment it takes to continue the work of this wonderful organization.

When I think of all that needs to be done on a continuing basis to keep the castle running smoothly and efficiently, the PCHS staff immediately comes to mind. It would not be possible to continue the work of the Society without them. Without exception, they are a conscientious and committed group of individuals. Collectively they carry out the daily operation of the Society and they are each and every one indispensable.

Often when I come to the Castle for a meeting or event, I have the pleasure of meeting our volunteers. Some come regularly to work on specific projects, and others come as needed or as their schedules permit. These individuals provide invaluable service to the Society. Many of the projects programs and events at the Castle would not be possible without their time, service and support. I am always amazed at how much is accomplished by our volunteers.

Essential to the operation of the Society is also the Board of Trustees and I am so very pleased to be working with such a dedicated group of people. The knowledge and expertise these individuals bring to the table is critical when important decisions need to be made. Their willingness to work for the good of the Society is commendable.

Although it is not possible for me to thank everyone individually, I would like all of the staff, volunteers, trustees, and members to know how much they are appreciated. PCHS would not be the successful and respected organization that it is without each and every one of you. Your service, support and commitment does not go unnoticed.

Happy Holidays.

Catherine Cavallo
President

RAISE THE BARNS

By Robert L. Cohen

In North America's remarkable history, the early Dutch farmers of seventeenth and eighteenth century New Netherlands were among the best farmers to provide sustenance to a growing nation. The Dutch West India Company ran their territory as a business and called their possession New Netherlands. This area roughly included most of the land between the Connecticut River to the northeast and the Delaware River to the south and west. The Dutch settled along the Hackensack, Passaic, Raritan and Millstone Rivers in New Jersey and the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers and Schoharie Creek in New York State.

While the Company was interested in the abundant timberlands and beaver pelts New Netherlands provided, the area also provided abundant fertile lands for farming. The Dutch brought with them barn building techniques from the United Provinces (now called The Netherlands). With some modifications, the Old World Dutch Barn became the New World Dutch Barn and they were built wherever the Dutch settled and farmed. Not only were they practical buildings for storing hay, sheltering animals and providing a threshing floor; the barns were beautiful buildings to behold. They were made of local wood and constructed in the vernacular H- frame style.¹



The Colfax barn in the 1930s. Photograph courtesy of the Wayne Historical Commission.

Several thousand New World Dutch Barns were built from the late seventeenth to early nineteenth century. Today only a few hundred of these structures are left, in various states of repair. A few of these barns, such as the Wortendyke Barn Museum in Park Ridge, have been kept in excellent condition. Unfortunately, these barns are the exception rather than the rule. While Bergen County has four New World Dutch barns, Passaic County has only one which is being kept disassembled in Wayne.

Passaic County's New World Dutch Barn has its roots as part of the Colfax family farm.² The Colfax farm passed from William Colfax to his son George Washington Colfax in 1790, after which time George built his house and barn on the land. The house, known today as the Schuyler-Colfax House, still stands on the Hamburg Turnpike. Very close to the house is where the Colfax Barn was built in the New World Dutch Barn style. The Colfax family continued to own this land for more than a century. Eventually the land was sold to Olaf Haroldson, whose heirs eventually subdivided the land for development.

Luckily, in 1940 an heir to the land, Mrs. Haroldson, and her daughter began selling ice cream in the old barn, which became known as the Alderney Milk Bar. After a while, the establishment became known as the Old Milk Bar, became a landmark to local people who patronized it for years.



The Old Barn Milk Bar as it looked in 1948. Photograph courtesy of the Wayne Historical Commission.

The Haroldson family sold the Milk Bar to Robert McMinn in the mid 1940's. McMinn passed the Milk Bar to his son Joseph and nephew Gerald. They closed the doors in December 2001.³ At the time, the McMinn family was feeling competitive pressure from other ice cream vendors and felt it was time to retire. They sold the land to Preakness Chevrolet who intended to use the space for a parking lot, putting the barn at risk.⁴ While this transaction was going on, the Wayne Historical Commission heard about the sale and raised funds to disassemble the building and store it. They used the funding to remove asbestos and store the hand hewn beams.⁵

Several years later, a new owner emerged. Richard Lauretta wanted to re-establish the Milk Bar and he received Wayne Planning Board approval on October 28, 2013 for re-building. He hopes to open the Milk Bar in the near future. While the style will remain the same as the Old Milk Bar, the original wood will not be used.

Please consider contacting the Wayne Historical Commission, Wayne Mayor Christopher Vergano and Wayne Township Council, and ask them to incorporate the original wood into the new building, as this would be doing a great service to Passaic County history.

References:

- 1 Cohen, Robert, "The Wortendyke Farm, An Example of Bergen County, New Jersey Agricultural History" de Halve Maen, Holland Society of New York, Spring, 1999, pages 15-19.
- 2 Cohen, Robert, "Colfax of the Guard and Wayne, N.J." the Historic County, Vol. 8, Issue 1, 2007, page 4.
- 3 Enderby, Greenwood, Larkin, "Barn Preservation and Adaptations", Rizzoli, 2014, pages 262-263.
- 4 Holl, John, "Jerseyana: Closing the Barn Door" New York Times, February 10 2002.
- 5 Robert V. Monacelli, Chairman, Wayne Historical Commission. Interview by author on August 7, 2015 at Wayne Municipal Building.
- 6 Winters, Debra, "Old Barn Milk Bar Will be Rebuilt in Wayne" Wayne Today, November 4, 2013.

For Further Reading

- Robert Cohen, "The Wortendyke Barn Museum," Dutch Barn Preservation Society Newsletter, Spring 1999, Vol. 12, Issue 1, part 2, pages 4-5.
- New World Barns discussed in article on Barns, Encyclopedia of New Jersey, Lurie and Mappen, Editors, Rutgers University Press, 2004, pages 56-67.



PASSAIC COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- November 11 – 29** **28th 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. Admission is \$6 and includes two return visits.
- Nov 30 – Dec 11** Castle Closed to set-up for Holiday Tours.
- December 8-11** **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 12-Jan 3. 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 207.
Tuesday-Friday
- December 11** **Candlelight Tour to Music.** 6 p.m. – 9 p.m. at Lambert Castle. Listen to the William Paterson's Frank Pavese perform Christmas music on the piano as you tour the Castle by candlelight. Tour is self-guided. Light refreshments provided. Admission Adults \$10, Seniors \$8, Children \$6.
Friday
- December 13** **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.
Sunday
- December 16** **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. (The Castle will be closed on Dec 25 and Jan 1).
January 3
- January 6** Regular Museum Tours Commence
- February 3** **Quarterly Meeting.** 7 p.m., at Lambert Castle. Business meeting of the Society followed by The Legend of the Freedom Quilts and the Underground Railroad, presented by Trish Chambers. The presentation discusses the history, legends and personal stories that make up the rich heritage associated with the Underground Railroad. It explores how African traditions and the use of story cloths documented the history of tribes and set the stage for the slaves to learn the lessons needed for survival during their arduous journey to freedom. Free admission.
Wednesday
- February 12** **Valentine's Day Masked Ball at Lambert Castle.** 7p.m.- 11 p.m. Don a mask and join us at Lambert Castle for some dancing. Light refreshment will be served. Cash Bar. Semi-formal attire requested. Tickets \$25 per person. No one under twenty-one years will be admitted. Reservations required. Call (973)247-0085 ext 201.
Friday
- February 13** **Make your own Victorian Valentine.** 1p.m.-4p.m. at Lambert Castle. Join us at Lambert Castle on Valentine's Day and make your own Victorian style Valentine. Learn about early Valentine cards and the evolution of the holiday. Regular museum admission applies.
Saturday

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