



WE'RE BACK!!

After a two year hiatus, the Closter Historical Society newsletter is being reactivated. As before, our goal will be to inform those people curious about the people, places, and events of Closter's long and interesting history.

We hope you enjoy our efforts, and of course we welcome your comments and input on anything we publish.



"CLOSTER BOROUGH HALL"

While racing through our daily schedule, who among us stops to notice the building that is central to our town, both in its location and function? While I have always found the Closter Borough Hall handsome, intriguing and unique in the area, many people have referred to it as "ugly" or "plain."

Closter Borough Hall, erected in 1938, was a triumph of effort and cooperation between our local leaders of that time and the able workforce provided by the federal Works Progress Administration (the "WPA"). Its style is described as Art Deco/Moderne, or "WPA Moderne," a label which denotes both the aesthetic elements of the architecture and its practical origins. Many municipal buildings such as post offices, municipal halls and airports were constructed by WPA labor during the 1930's.

Prior to 1938, all important borough records were stored in the homes of municipal personnel! A "Bergen Review" article dated March 11, 1938 states: "The Borough Clerk's office was a small room in the private residence of the official, and the borough records were kept both in the attic of his residence or in one of two safes placed in other buildings, some of them inaccessible except at specified periods, which were not always at the time when the records were wanted. The Tax Collector was under the same handicap. A room in his residence was used, much to the discomfort of all borough officials as well as the members of his family."

The town leaders at that time, including Mayor Howard Wilson and Councilmen George Trautwein and



Architect's drawing of Borough Hall, 1938.

John Potterton, decided to locate the municipal building "central as designated by the life of the town, not through a civil engineer's compass" (which would have placed it between First Street and Piermont Road). The land was purchased for a mere \$3000, which was then returned to the town, "the seller having tax arrears on other property and paid these with the sale money given him." Architect Carl G. Mettberg designed the building, and the WPA labor to construct it was provided at very little cost (25% of its actual value). A ceremonial laying of the cornerstone took place on March 12, 1938.

Some stylistic details which make this building interesting are the light-yellow colored vertical ornamentations on the front of the building, which are meant to evoke the image of a Mayan temple. This style was popular at that time in many Art Deco buildings. At the top of each of these areas there is a circular design with outward-projecting "darts." During Borough Hall's earlier years, flagpoles projected above the roofline at the top of each of these decorative towers. Another stylistic feature that is still present is the horizontal band of the stucco dentil molding, running across the building near the parapet.

The bay doors that had serviced the fire and police departments in earlier days have been removed, the front door has been replaced, and an addition has been made at the rear of the building, but the original feeling of that 1938 structure is still quite evident today. The next time that you are approaching the center of town on Closter Dock Road, or are parked in the commercial lot across the street from it, take a long look at our Borough Hall. Perhaps you will now envision its history and appreciate its unique beauty.

JENNIFER ROTHSCHILD



Closter Borough Hall, circa 1944 While this photograph shows all of the original features of the building, it also shows a temporary structure on the roof. This was erected to allow "air raid wardens" to monitor the skies for enemy planes during World War II!

Historic Auryansen Cemetery Grant

Did you know that six Revolutionary War soldiers are buried in Closter? Closter's illustrious history is well represented in the little-known but historically important 18th and 19th Century cemetery located between Hickory Lane and Susan Drive.

Now called the Auryansen Cemetery, it was first known as "the burial ground" when it was situated on Naugle-owned land in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The tombstones bear family names familiar to us now as Closter street names: Naugle, Demarest, Vervalen, Haring and Bogert, to name a few.

Much restoration work was done in the cemetery from 1995 to 1998. At that time, a number of stones were rescued and restored through the generous donations of Closter citizens and businesses. The cemetery has since been overtaken by the aggressive overgrowth of Sassafras tree saplings that are now obscuring and lifting up the beautiful historic gravestones.

The Closter Historic Preservation Commission has received a grant from the Open Space, Historic Preservation and Recreation fund to address this overgrowth problem. A tree expert will be contracted to clear the cemetery of debris, dead limbs and will cut back and reduce the re-growth of the Sassafras saplings. Watch for articles and photographs in the local newspapers to document this important work in the Spring and early Summer.

IRENE STELLA

VISIT OUR WEBSITE:

www.closterhistoricpreservation.org

To read about Closter's history, see old photographs, read our Design Guidelines for historic buildings, and more!!

Closter Historical Society
243 West Street
Closter, New Jersey 07624

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CLOSTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

270 Harrington Avenue...

Built between 1865 and 1876, 270 Harrington Avenue is an imposing Second Empire Victorian, one of less than 20 that Closter possesses.

This was originally the home of William Ferdon, a descendent of W. Ferdon (also known as Wilhelmus Verdon), whose property is shown on the Philip Verplanck Survey Map of 1745.

By 1900, the house was owned by Dr. Louis Parsell, one of the early physicians of Northeastern Bergen County. He started his practice around 1884 and sold it in 1907. In 1941, Melvin M. Quackenbush and Closter architect, Louis Vida bought the house from the estate of Dr. Parsell's widow, Julia, for just under \$5,000. They invested around \$8,000 to make the house into two apartments and installed kitchen and bathroom fixtures displayed at the 1939 World's Fair. They boasted "the best kitchens and bathrooms in Closter". Selling it three years later for \$16,000, they just about broke even. Mr. Quackenbush was the author of "Looking over My Shoulder", an early history of Closter.

The house was purchased by Marcel and Angela Jovine on the royalties generated by Mr. Jovine's fledgling toy effort, "The Blessed event Doll", a popular seller of the time. Using the third floor attic as a studio Mr. Jovine went on to produce ever more popular toy items including pirate ships, toy soldiers, and his most popular items, the Visible Man, Visible Woman, and the Visible V-8 Engine.

Mr. Jovine said that the success of the Soviet space program had inspired him to make these novel items, "I wanted to make hobby items that would teach something to the children who put them together."

In 1964, Mr. Jovine designed the Closter Tercentenary medallion, which led to another career in designing medallic art, such as the 1980 Lake Placid Olympics, and the 1990 Eisenhower Centennial Dollar, which led to his receiving the Sandord Saltus Award, the highest honor in American numismatics. His third floor studio is preserved exactly as he left it.

Mr. Jovine (1921- 2003), an Italian POW in W.W. II, was sent to Pennsylvania where Angela D'Ora, a pianist and singer, performed USO concerts for the prisoners. Following the war, he returned to the United States and married Miss D'Ora. The Jovines have two daughters, Marcia, an attorney in Washington, D.C., and Andrea, a well known fashion designer. The house is still owned by the Jovine family.



For many years the Jovine family sponsored the annual staging of operas in their gardens for UNICO, an Italian-American scholarship foundation; recently, the Closter Lions Club, in conjunction with the Jovine sisters, briefly revived this tradition with the production of two operas.

BOBBI BOUTON-GOLDBERG

West Street...

West Street occupies a unique position both in the geography it occupies and the history of Closter. While only eight tenths of a mile long, to travel either up or down its length is to make a journey through the architectural history of Closter from the Colonial era to the 19th century with common vernacular buildings, Queen Anne, Second Empire Victorian, Carpenter Gothic, two interesting churches, Colonial revival, and 20th century ranch, and Cape Cods along the way. In fact, the range and diversity of the housing stock on this street would be exceptional anywhere.

Reputedly, West street began as a Native American trail when the Lenni Lenape Indians occupied this land prior to the European entry into the real estate market around 1670. At the bottom of West Street, was a stream laced woodland abounding in game for the Native Americans, who apparently occupied the fields now occupied by the Lupardi family plant nursery. Evidence of large tent pole village, arrow heads and a rare 2,000 year old spear point have been found in this area.

At the upper, Southern, end of West Street, the old Closter Reformed church landmarks the hilltop as it has since 1864. The next two blocks North are a rich and pleasant procession of mainly late 19th Century houses that are for the most part, completely intact from their initial day of creation. This area is about to proposed as part of a newly designated West Street / Harrington Avenue Historic District, as a distinct area worthy of Historic Preservation in perpetuity.

The Closter Historic Commission considers this street particularly important because it serves as a gateway street for all who enter Closters' Main Street, either from



West Street looking North, circa 1890

High Street, Harrington Avenue, or Blanche Avenue. The impression is the same from all directions: a consistent streetscape of historically interesting, pleasing and harmonious homes that have an overall collective power greater than any collection of less consistent homes could ever have. Clearly the sum total effect is greater than the individual parts could be.

In recognition of this streetscape's unique value, The Closter Historical Preservation Commission plans to designate 28 buildings as an Historical District. Twenty-two of these buildings are on West Street, five on Harrington Avenue, and one on the corner of Closter Dock Road.

To educate the public, the Commission plans to arrange a display at the library in Nov./Dec. featuring the history of this area, these buildings, and their owners. We also plan on presenting a slide show of these structures, which will include architectural detail.

We are in the process of researching information and photos of this Historical District. We especially want to find the names and background of the people who lived here and learn about their lives. Anyone having information or old photos please contact Bobbie Bouton-Goldberg at 201-784-5760, or email bbgandpg@aol.com.

The library has agreed to set aside a special section where the Commission can store and oversee historical materials.

This would make it possible for the public to have access to Closter's interesting past. It also would give residents the opportunity to find a good place for items they may want to donate.

DOUGLAS RADICK

