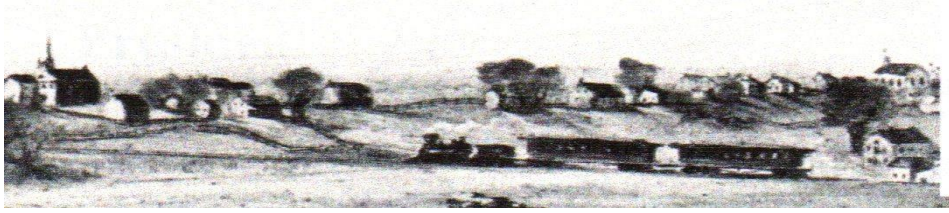


Madison Historical Society

Madison, N.J



November 2023
Newsletter
2nd edition 2023-2024

In The News

The Madison Historical Society has been engaged in several major projects that will soon transform the society into a more visible and effective guardian of the Borough's history. The following are updates on some of those projects.

Portrait of the Rose City: A History of Madison, New Jersey

As part of the 1776 Bicentennial celebration a history of Madison's founding and development, *The Madison Heritage Trail*, written by Dr. Frank Esposito, was published in 1985. Susan Simon, president of the Madison Historical Society, and Nancy Adamczyk, director of the Madison Public Library, proposed an updated edition. Dr. Esposito agreed to revise the original chapters incorporating new research and advances in scholarship. The new book would extend the narrative into the 21st century in three new chapters.



Representatives from the historical society and the library formed a committee to review the original chapters and to produce the new chapters that would be edited by Dr. Esposito. The committee includes longtime and newer Madison residents, volunteers to local service organizations and representatives to town and area boards. Each of the members has brought enthusiasm and commitment to the project and employed their myriad talents to ensure its completion.

Committee members developed outlines for the new chapters and volunteered to research and write parts of the new chapters. Photographs for each chapter of the book were selected and reviewed.

The committee's work is approaching an end. A publishing proposal, including 7 book chapters, will be sent to a university press for their consideration this month. This is a new history of Madison and has a new name: *Portrait of the Rose City: A History of Madison, New Jersey*.



The Madison History Museum

On February 28, 2022, the Society signed an agreement with the Borough of Madison that would make the east wing of the Hartley Dodge Memorial Building the new home of the Madison History Museum. Since that time, a Society committee chaired by Susan Simon has been working on the architectural plans for the wing's renovation and they will be finalized in mid-November. This includes new lighting, expanded electrical outlets, UV window shades, elevator access, a kitchenette, and offices in the back of the museum's main gallery. The committee has also begun identifying exhibit themes including interactive stations with some of the exhibits. The Borough plans on receiving bids on the renovation in December 2023.

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Message From President Virginia Laughlin

The holidays will be upon us shortly and with the year-end approaching, it is good counsel to look back at the projects we have undertaken in 2023. That is one of the major topics in this newsletter. Reviewed projects include the Madison History Museum, our new branding project that involves the adoption of a new logo and website, and our Oral History Project that has several interviews “in the can” and working to identify more prospective interviewees to record their recollections of Madison for future generations. If you are a longtime resident or know of someone who is and wishes to share their memories, please contact us through our website. We are also continuing our work in collaboration with the Madison Public Library to update Madison’s history book titled “The Madison Heritage Trail”. We hope to publish the new book, titled the “Portrait of the Rose City” sometime in 2024.

We also completed the temporary relocation of our office over the summer. We will be working from our new location until the renovation of the Public Library is completed and we can move back home again.

It has been an extremely busy year for the Society, and I want to thank all who volunteer and work so tirelessly for the organization.

Reminder: History Society Office Closed



Just a short reminder that with the Madison Public Library’s main building closed for renovations for at least five months. The Madison Historical Society’s office is also closed. Operating remotely, the Society can be reached by mail at P.O Box 148, Madison, 07940, Email:

historicalsociety@rosenet.org, or by phone: 973-377-0722x8 on Tuesdays.

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New Branding for the Society

On April 10, 2023, the Society board approved a motion to engage in a major branding project. Pfeifer Design, headed by Kris Pfeifer, a Madison resident, was selected to head up the project. A Society Committee led by Blair Conley, was to work with Kris. The project involved designing a new logo for the Society, a new website, and an expanded presence on social media. The committee has been working very hard for several months with Kris on this project. Design of the logo is complete and substantial progress has been made on the design of a new website. Currently the various elements of the project are due for simultaneous unveiling early in 2024.

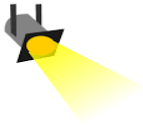


250th Anniversary Celebration of the Revolutionary War



The 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution is in 2026 and plans, while in the early stages, have begun. A New Jersey State Committee has held a number of regional meetings to update towns about statewide planning. One such meeting occurred in September, 2023 in Morristown and Madison sent four representatives. Borough financial officer Jim Burnet attended. Jim is also in charge of the Hillside Cemetery which is filled with revolutionary war figures. In addition to Burnet, the Madison Historical Society sent three representatives: President Ginnie Laughlin, Vice President Herm Huber, and Susan Simon.

Attendees at the 250th Revolutionary War Anniversary planning meeting: Senator N.J. Senator Cory Booker, Herm Huber, Susan Simon, and Ginnie Laughlin



Spotlight on History

THE CURIOUS PRESENCE OF THE DOOR IN THE WOODS

by Herman Huber

PART 2

In Part 1 of the story of the mysterious door in the woods, (see last newsletter - September 2023), we learned that the Loantaka property passed from former Madison Mayor William F. Redmond to the final owner/resident, Franklyn Hallett Lovell, Jr. in 1910. In Part 2, we learn about him and his interesting life, and move closer to an understanding of the great mystery. Enjoy.

Lovell tore down the Redmond home and set about creating a new, marvelous and up-to-date mansion, incorporating modern technologies. For example, the three story house was built with a steel frame, covered with stucco and brick, and included “an electric elevator with stops in the basement and all 3 floors, 250 light outlets, over 60 switches, 10 stations of inter-communication telephone and three long distance telephone stations.”¹⁴ All of this was powered by the property's own 200 amp gasoline-powered electric power plant, placed 600 feet from the main house.¹⁵ In a civic gesture, he even agreed to pay for the "macadamizing" of Loantaka Way between Woodland and Shunpike Road out of his own substantial pocket.¹⁶ Finally, in October 1913, he and his family moved into the new home. Maps and newspaper accounts show the property contained the main house, a large automobile garage/stable, and a small dwelling used mostly by the chauffeur. Kennels owned by William Connon appear for the first time in a 1931 Sanborn map (1948 correction),^{16a} west of the Lovell structures. Connon had a presence there since about 1914.



The triangle of property where the Mysterious door resides.

No sooner had the Lovells moved in than tragedy struck. Gas fumes from the aforementioned electric power plant leaked into the stable, and caused the asphyxiation of two prized horses.¹⁷ By October 1914, perhaps assuaging his grief over the loss, Lovell purchased a dashing Pierce-Arrow Roadster. Once again, no sooner had he begun to enjoy the automobile, when tragedy struck. Driving to Newark, he struck a road laborer on Morris Turnpike. The victim, Angelo Greco suffered severe injuries and died.

In the meantime, Mrs. Florence Lovell was not one to sit idly while her husband scooted around town in his Roadster. She became deeply involved in the Equal Suffrage League, served as its vice-president, and hosted large tea gatherings in her home to rally for

change. One such gathering in February 1914 was called, “Women and Legislation.” She also became the vice-president of the local chapter of the American Institute of Child Life.¹⁸ One of her other great passions was gardening. In October 1915 in the Madison Eagle, she extolled the virtue and pleasure of building portable greenhouses next to her home, growing beautiful flowers that professionals wrongly predicted would fail.

If you’ve ever heard an old car horn that sounds like, “AH-OOH-GA!” you’ve heard the famous Klaxon horn. Submarines also made that sound as a diving alarm. In a prescient move, Lovell bought the rights to that strange horn noise from an inventor, electrified it, realized its potential to be a potent warning signal rather than a novelty item, and began to manufacture it. Despite initial laws banning the horn due to its “diabolical noise,” he succeeded in spades. It became the voice of the early automobile. He eventually sold his interest in the company. By the 1920 US Census, his household consisted of himself, his wife, 2 daughters, 5 servants, and 1 nurse. And in December 1917, he bought himself 2 new Pierce-Arrow motorcars, reputed to be “the handsomest cars in town.”¹⁹

Not many Madisonians can boast a home visit by a former US president. But ex-president William Howard Taft visited the Lovell home on May 26, 1917 and spoke for an hour to the 45 men in attendance, to much applause. He strongly encouraged US involvement in the Great War and raised at least \$5,000 (with more promised) for the national YMCA’s efforts to provide welfare work to the soldiers.²⁰

By 1932, the Lovells made plans to leave Madison and sold their remaining 40 acres to Geraldine Dodge in May. They departed soon thereafter for homes in Martha’s Vineyard and Park Avenue in New York. F. Hallett Lovell died in NY on May 19, 1962. He was 94. The grand 1913 home was demolished sometime after June 1978. Finally, in December 1994, the property was deeded to the County of Morris through Prudential Insurance Company.

In life, some say it's the journey, not the destination. Perhaps so here. So, what of the door in the forest? Eliminating the impossible, like aliens or ancient civilizations, unfortunately still leaves many possibilities. Various maps show that a barn was on the property in 1869; by 1887 there were additional stables or barns, about where the mysterious door in the wall is visible today.

The 1910 map shows William Redmond having a large house on the Woodland Road side of the property with several paths for carriages and horses that led from the house to a single barn and a lower double barn. A small dwelling was near those lower barns. There was an entrance to the property there on Loantaka Way, the driveway bearing around the wall and up to the barns. Since Redmond was a breeder of horses, these new structures would have provided him with additional space for his business. If he built the stonewall with the tunnel/door, it likely served as the foundation for the double barn built on the hill above and behind it. Maps though don’t show walls - if it was present then, the door might have been a tunnel to store things (such as ice from the nearby pond, or a root cellar, or to provide passage past the wall and to the barns). This may be the most likely origin and purpose of the wall and the door.

By the time of the 1921 map, the double barns are gone, perhaps burned or torn down.²¹ What was then on the maps of the Lovell property besides the mansion and the small dwelling (which is known to have been the residence of the chauffeur), was a large 2-story automobile garage - undoubtedly housing those handsome Pierce-Arrow automobiles. It is approximately where the single barn had been (or possibly it is the single barn, repurposed and expanded). With the double barn gone, there would have been no reason for Lovell to have built that wall. In an aerial photo in 1957, the wall is visible. When the tunnel was filled in with cement however, is unknown. What is on these maps is difficult to connect clearly with what is or was on the ground.

And now, the hilly site, once proudly boasting mansions, service buildings, greenhouses and gardens, trotters, and a former US president, has inevitably returned to wilderness with nary a trace of what once was - save for

the wall with the door. Perhaps, not even Sherlock Holmes could have solved the mystery of the curious presence of the door in the woods.

sources:

Appreciation to the following people who provided help during the research phase of this article: Blair Conley, Howard Craig, Janet Foster, Ann Huber, Kate Malcolm, Keith Munkel, and various Face Book members.

14. Madison Eagle, August 9, 1912.
15. Madison Eagle, May 23, 1913.
16. Madison Eagle, October 3, 1913.
- 16a. Sanborn Map Company, Madison, March 1931, corrected 1948.
17. *Valuable Horses Aphxyiated [sic]*. Madison Eagle, October 31, 1913.
18. *Suffrage Tea Was Great Success*. Madison Eagle, February 13, 1914.
19. Madison Eagle, December 7, 1917.
20. *Ex-President Taft and Wayland Ayer Raised \$5,000 for Y.M.C.A. At Front*. Madison Eagle. June 1, 1917.
21. 1921, Sanborn Map Company, Madison, Sheet 23.

Oral History Project Announced



Do you have a Madison story or stories you would like to share? We would love to hear from you!

The Madison Oral History Project, led by Laurie Hagerich, was created to collect, preserve, and share memories of current and past residents for future generations. Or perhaps you never lived in Madison but have something you would like to share. The project provides a unique way to discover Madison history through the experiences and perspectives of others. Our goal is to provide a deeper understanding of our past by recording these memories on an individual level.

Video interviews will be conducted with residents and their responses and memories recorded. These recordings will be available to the public when the Madison History Museum, to be located in the Hartley Dodge Memorial, opens in 2025.

If you have memories of Madison that you would like to share, contact the society at historicalsociety@rosenet.org, 973-377-0722x8, USPS: P.O. Box 148, Madison, N.J. 07940 or through the Society website.

A Family Visit to Madison

- Doug Simon, Madison Historical Society

In mid-summer of 1902, a two wagon, horse drawn caravan made a visit to Waverly Place in Madison. The wagons contained the seven member Lasley family that had travelled a zigzagging course traversing the entire width of the United States. This is their story.



The entire Lasley Family and their mobile home.

to make ends meet and Morgan decided to strike out on his own to search for work. Mary would have none of it and suggested that they build a house on wheels so they could travel as a family. The wagon, known as “Lasley’s Traveling Palace”, was 14 feet long, 6 feet high and only 5 feet wide. It had three windows and a door, a stove, a cupboard, folding table, folding beds and commode. After traveling to California for awhile, they then went to Seattle by steam boat. All this time, the Lasley family was attracting more attention. Tired of answering questions, Morgan decided to write a book, *Acrose (sic) America in the Only House on Wheels*, about the first part of their journey. He also bought a camera, took photographs, and made copies to sell. The money from the sale of these items helped pay for their journey. In total, they travelled 6,666 miles from Port Angeles, through San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Denver, Texas, St. Louis and on to New York, arriving in November 17, 1897. While in the New York area, they ventured to Madison, New Jersey to sell their book and photographs and tell their story.

The Lasley family had dreams of touring Europe, but finally they gave their home on wheels to an amusement park in McKeesport, Pa.

Hard times put Morgan Lasley and his new wife, Mary Ambrust on a nomadic path early in their marriage. They and their growing family moved from Colorado, to Pocatello, Idaho, to Port Angeles, Washington in 1889. In Washington, Morgan seemed to be on the path of success where he filed a land claim on 160 acres south of Port Angeles. He set up business in mattress and furniture repair. In November 1890 he was sued over his land claim and ultimately the Department of the Interior said he needed to pay \$200 for the land. In the end, they lost the claim.

The Panic of 1893 made it difficult for the couple



On the right is Morgan Lasley visiting Waverly Place.

The Madison Historical Society

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Office Hours: Due to renovation work at the library, the Historical Society office is closed for several months..

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